

The Wilmot-Tavistock Gazette

FARM EDITION 2024

Terra Nova Dairy: A 280-head Oxford County dairy farm near Hickson

By Gary West

It was the early 1990s when a dairyman from Holland, who was only 24 years old at the time, decided to make the trip across the Atlantic Ocean to Canada to work on dairy farms southwestern Ontario.

Peter Overdevest eventually headed home to bring his parents back to Canada. The family then purchased the Raymer dairy farm on the Line 16 in East Zorra Township in Oxford County, the dairy capital of Canada.

As with most dairy farms, many changes have been made to the farm over the years where the Overdevest family now milk its Terra Nova herd of Holsteins with a robotic-milking system.

The family's five robots take the work and labour out of milking cows, a big step forward from when the cows were milked in a tie-stall parlour back in September of 1992 when the family first immigrated to Canada.

Peter Overdevest says it was a far cry from when they milked 23 cows in a small parlour in Holland, while also raising 200 sheep and growing potatoes.

His wife, Jodi, who was raised with horses near Hillsburgh, worked on dairy farms milking cows while going to school as a



Peter, son and calf manager Mitch and Jodi Overdevest in their newly renovated calf facility, where calves are raised in a clean, healthy environment. Contributed photo

teen. She says with a smile she was never going to marry a dairy farmer, but in later

years, grew to love their dairy-farming life.

Not only has farming been their life, but in November of 2022, the couple started a new adventure known as "Terra Nova Nordic Café and Spa Services" located two kilometres south of Hickson.

Jodi says business took off faster than they ever thought possible, and plans are already in the works for expansion in 2024. They have entertained guests from as far away as Kentucky and Michigan, but the bulk of their business is from London, Hamilton, Guelph, Toronto, Kitchener-Waterloo and many from the immediate Oxford and Perth county areas.

She says the Nordic-thermal experience has become very popular with visitors.

Besides the dairy farm and spa, Peter is also busy as the newly elected member to the Dairy Farmers of Ontario board of directors, taking over from Plattsville area dairy farmer Murray Sherk, who represented Region 8 for 12 years.

The region includes 530 milk producers from Oxford County and the Region of Waterloo.

As a graduate from the 2016 Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program, Peter feels privileged to be able to help lead the dairy industry and hopes his family will continue producing Grade A milk for many years into the future.



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FARM EDITION 2024 —

Gottlieb Bettschen: Progressive farmer and community leader

By Al Junker

Wilmot Township has had several progressive agricultural leaders over many years. These individuals pushed the envelope by adapting new techniques, equipment or crops, as well as promoting new methods of farming. One such individual was Gottlieb Bettschen of the New Dundee area.

Gottlieb farmed on the south half of Lot 6, Concession Two Block A, which today is the corner of Bethel Road, and Queen Street in Wilmot Township. Jacob

Bettschen, Gottlieb's father, took up the 150 acres around 1829. He had travelled extensively through the area and decided to establish an outpost on Lot 6 "in connection with the (family's) Dundas clock business."

Jacob, with the help of his two brothers, cleared a small section of land near Alder Creek and erected a log shanty which was 12 by 18 feet. He travelled back and forth on foot between Dundas and his shanty. On May 29, 1830, Jacob married Elizabeth Klopfenstein in Preston. The Klopfensteins lived on Lot 5 adjacent to Jacob's land. The young couple cleared their land and, sometime in 1830, they purchased a frame building in Waterloo Township, moved it by oxen to their land and erected what Gottlieb described as "the first frame house building in Wilmot." The young family moved back and forth between their land in Wilmot and Preston where Jacob had started a watchmaking business.

Gottlieb Bettschen was born in Preston on Sept. 3, 1841. The family moved back to Wilmot when he was six months old and they continued to clear their lot. When Gottlieb was old enough, his father purchased a small yoke of oxen for him. Gottlieb worked among the stumps and one of his main jobs was to haul logs back to the house to be cut and split for firewood. He did not attend school but received his education from his father in the evenings. At the age of seven, Gottlieb was a member of the New Dundee brass band playing the triangles. He worked in the nursery business from 1862 to



The first frame dwelling in Wilmot was purchased by the Klopfensteins in Waterloo Township in 1830 and moved by oxen to their property in Wilmot. Photos courtesy of Wilmot Township Archives

1867, grafting, pruning and selling trees in the winter for delivery in the spring. Following his deliveries, he worked at grafting trees, haying and harvesting. On Jan. 1, 1867, Gottlieb married Mary Copley who lived on a nearby farm.

Gottlieb purchased land in Hay Township near Zurich. His intention was to start a nursery growing fruit trees by taking advantage of the microclimate provided by the lake breeze from Lake Huron. At

the same time, Gottlieb rented an acre from his father for \$5 a year. He established a vineyard and a nursery on this acre to start stock for his larger nursery in Zurich. He introduced the Concord and Delaware varieties, which were the first sweet grapes to be successfully cultivated in this area. The grapes were used for winemaking and eating. Gottlieb's cultivation of grapes resulted in the Bettschen farm being referred to as the Vineyard

Continued on page 16



Gottlieb and Mary Bettschen.



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FARM EDITION 2024 —

Gottlieb Bettschen

Continued from page 15

Farm. Gottlieb wrote and published a pamphlet entitled, "A concise treatise on the culture, propagating and maintaining of the grapes as well as the making of wine."

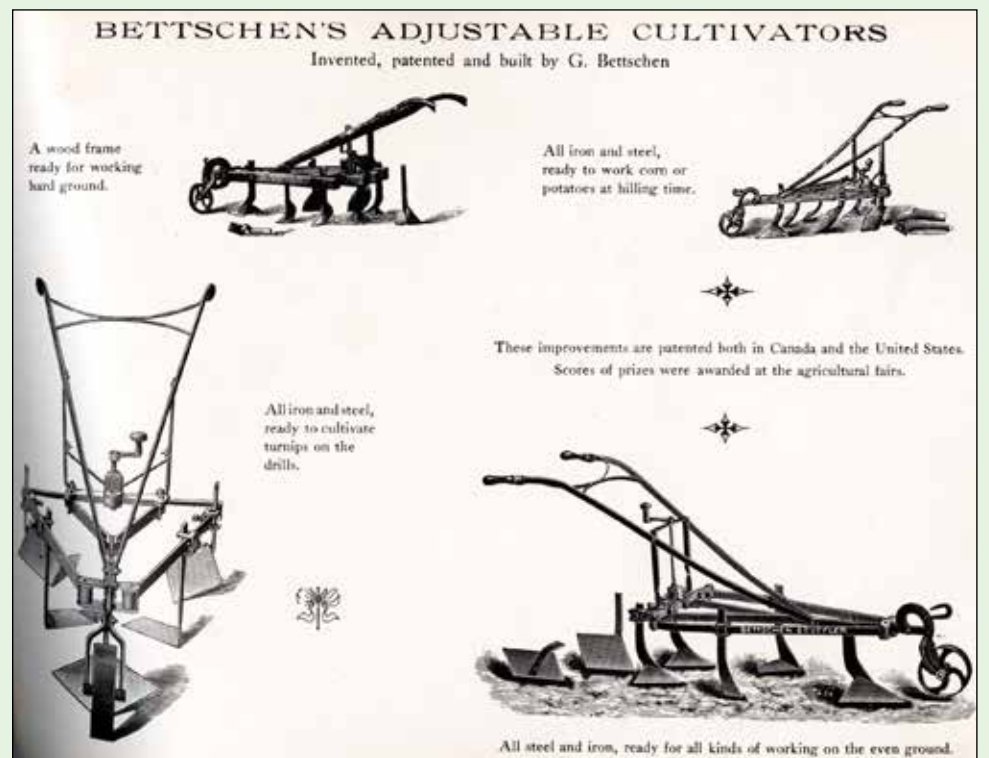
On July 23, 1869, Jacob Bettschen died suddenly and, as Gottlieb stated, "This changed everything." He moved to the farm and rented it from the estate. The farm required improvements and Gottlieb also needed to finalize his father's other business interests which included serving as the executor for a variety of estates in the area and a sawmill (now the Lyndon Fish Hatcheries Inc.). Gottlieb introduced "a new system of farming" which saw rutabagas used for animal feed. He grew them on a much-larger scale than was normal. Gottlieb soon learned a suitable cultivator for the growing of rutabagas did not exist so "he invented, built, and introduced the Bettschen adjustable corn and root cultivator." He was granted several patents in Canada and the United States, and the cultivator won many awards at farm exhibitions where it was displayed. Bettschen was a breeder of thoroughbred sheep, shorthorns and cattle and a member of the Dominion Short Horn Association.

In 1880, Gottlieb was one of the founders of the Farmers' Institute of South

Waterloo. The organization promoted improved agricultural practices. Gottlieb served as a longtime director. He wrote articles and made numerous presentations at Farmers' Institutes throughout the area. During the late 1880s, he also expanded the barn to improve conditions for the livestock and to double the number which could be housed.

Gottlieb purchased several building lots on the east side of Front Street in New Dundee. In 1887, he built the Jubilee Block named in honour of Queen Victoria's golden jubilee. A large addition was added the following year. In 1910, the block was purchased by Herman Kavelman who operated Kavelman's store until 1971. Today, it is the home of the New Dundee Emporium. In 1900, Bettschen played a prominent role in the establishment of the New Dundee Library. He offered rent free space in his Jubilee Block. The library remained there until 1962. Gottlieb also served as the president of the board of management.

In 1906, Gottlieb Bettschen retired from farming. He purchased the home on the corner of Front and Main streets in New Dundee. Vineyard Farm was taken over by his daughter, Alice, and her husband, Edwin Hallman. In 1909, Gottlieb played a prominent role in the establishment of the creamery operated by the Farmers



Gottlieb Bettschen designed, built and patented adjustable cultivators for corn and root vegetables when he started growing rutabagas as animal feed.

Co-operative Company of New Dundee. The following year, he researched, wrote and published Genealogical Biographical and Pictorial History of the Bettschen Family and Its Connections. The material for this article was gleaned from this very informative publication. Gottlieb

Bettschen passed away on Oct. 11, 1914, bringing an end to a very active career in the agricultural affairs of Wilmot Township. He and his wife Mary are buried in the New Dundee Union Cemetery.



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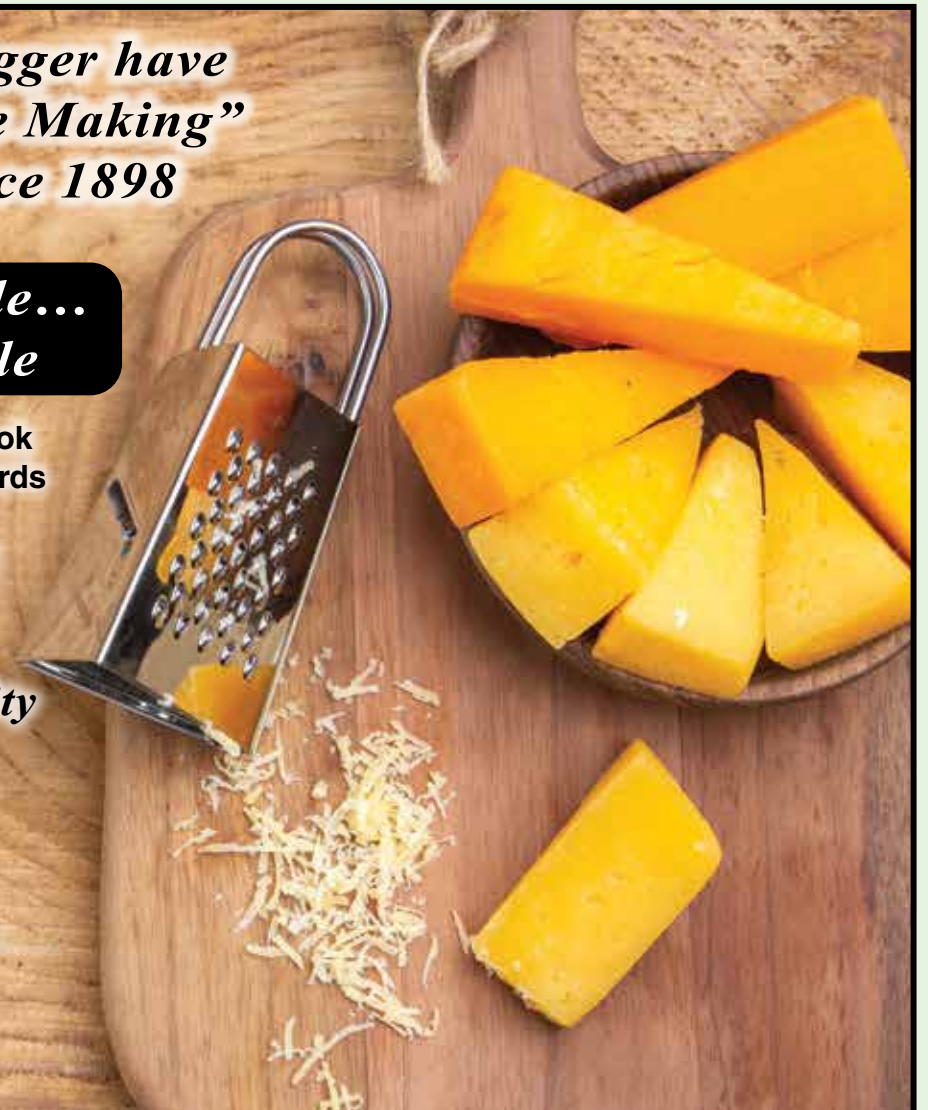
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FARM EDITION 2024 —

Oak Manor Organic: From farming to flour production

By Emily Stewart

Oak Manor Organic went through several changes to the business since its inception and saw changes in demand for organic products.

Oak Manor, which sells flour, seeds, oat flakes and other baking essentials, first operated as a 12,000-acre conventional farm in the 1960s. Perry Reibling, general manager, said the now mill-store at 756907 Oxford County Road 5 in Tavistock cut back on its acre space in the early 1970s and switched to organic farming.

"Organic had a much different perspective on agriculture," Reibling said, "eliminating synthetic pesticides, herbicides, chemicals, fertilizers – all that kind of stuff – for more regenerative and natural processes. That was on the farm and at that point we thought, 'There's got to be a market for this organic product that we were actually producing.'"

Oak Manor added a stone mill in 1975 and sold flour to natural-food stores under the brand name. Due to several people focusing on adding whole grains to their diet, plenty of whole-wheat flour was sold, but there was a niche consumer base.

"It wasn't a big market by any means," Reibling said. "Over the years, it's slowly grown to be very mainstream."

Eventually, Oak Manor sold the farm and kept the mill.

"We focused on providing the finished product to customers," Reibling said. "There were a lot of other organic farms that have cropped up in the region over the years and they needed a place to market their grains. We couldn't do both anymore. We were running ourselves ragged."

Dealing with debt because of the high interest rates of the 1980s was also a factor leading to the change in priorities for Oak Manor.

Reibling said there are health and sustainability benefits to organic-agricultural products.

"Organic farmers don't spray or use inputs into the environment that are detrimental to the environment," he said. "It's healthier for people because those products are not in your food. Also, another facet of organic farming is no genetically modified seeds can be used in organic agriculture."

Along with holding the general manager position, Reibling took on several roles in the family-owned business. He's performed marketing, farming, bookkeeping and delivery duties.

"Being small, you kind of have your fingers on everything so you never get bored," he said. "It's not mundane,

that's for sure. Even with all of the stress that comes with running a small business, sometimes it still keeps you on your toes."

Oak Manor Organic is prepared for any new demands and changes within the industry. For example, whole-wheat flour is now something customers might add to their baking. The mill will also contract out some of its products to larger mills, such as white flour.

"One of the things we've always had to do is be willing to evolve, so we'll see where that takes us," Reibling said.

Oak Manor Organic Products can be bought online, at the mill site, at health-food stores, in bulk bins, Loblaws and some regional Sobey's. For more information and to order products online, visit oak-manor.myshopify.com.



Verna Bender has been part of Oak Manor Organic for 49 years. Bender, Perry Reibling's aunt, runs the business' sewing equipment. Contributed photo

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FARM EDITION 2024 —

Perth County farmers Greg and Staci Leis raise quality, organic broiler chickens

By Gary West

There have been many changes over the years on Ontario farms, but none have seen more positive changes than the broiler-chicken industry.

Greg and Staci Leis took over from Greg's parents, Dale and Elaine Leis, in 2012, carrying forward the Dalaine Poultry Farms tradition in Perth County's South Easthope Township, southeast of Shakespeare.

Since then, they replaced an older, two-storey barn with two single-storey barns that are each 21,000 square feet in size, placing their first birds in new barns in January 2017.

While considering different barn designs, the young couple visited a number of organic-broiler barns which put them on a path towards organic-chicken production.

After producing chickens for over 20 years, Greg said this was a very different challenge for the young entrepreneurs and a chance to fill a niche market that was growing, still under supply management.

Approximately 18,000 chicks are placed in each barn and the growing birds are in the barn for 37 to 38 days at 2.2 kilograms.



Greg and Staci Leis hold two one-day old chicks in one of their new broiler-chicken barns where they raise chickens for the Organic Market. Photo by Gary West

They arrive at the farm as day-old chicks weighing approximately 42 grams. The barn is thoroughly cleaned and prepped with clean bedding for every new flock.

The Leis' chickens are sold through Yorkshire Valley Farms and processed at the Farm Fresh Poultry plant in Harriston.

Under organic requirements, the birds need more space – 21 kilograms per square-metre is the maximum density. The birds are fed organic feed with no

prohibited substances in or around the barns. The birds are required to have natural daylight – one per cent of floor space needs to allow natural light – and eight hours of darkness.

When birds are 25 days or older and the weather permits, access to the outdoors is required. The pasture area needs to be the same size as the indoor space. If there are threats of avian influenza (bird flu), then no outdoor access is allowed.

The air inlets are equipped with fans, so when the outdoor-access doors are open, the ventilation system neutralizes the air pressure.

According to Greg, this helps maintain good air quality on the far side of the barn away from the access doors and reduces wind speed at the access doors.

He says the family joke is his grandfather built a barn in the 1950s with windows, and barns in the late 60s and 70s were built without windows.

"We've now progressed so far that we are now building barns with windows again. Everything old is new again," he laughed.

On the Leis farm, since it is a family farm, family members help with barn and field-work including growing organic corn, soybeans, wheat and some hay for a rotation in weed control.

Their daughter Elissa helps when not at her bakery business in nearby Stratford, Vann's Fine Bakery.

With 1,300 chicken producers in Ontario, consumers can be assured farmers like Greg and Staci Leis are in it for the long haul to produce quality, organic chicken for those who want to buy a very healthy local product.



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FARM EDITION 2024 —

Peel County dairy farmers move to Oxford County with herd of show-winning Jerseys

By Gary West

Oxford County is known as the Dairy Capital of Canada and, when dairy farm families are looking for a change in scenery from other farming areas in Ontario, the Oxford area is one they look to.

The family that owns Glenholme Jerseys Inc., the Rutas and Mellows from Peel County, recently moved its herd of show-winning Jerseys to a modern dairy farm southwest of New Hamburg near Punkeydoodle's Corner.

The family was able to purchase an active dairy operation from Martin and Erica Van Rooyen on the 18th Line of East-Zorra Tavistock Township.

They have decades of dairy experience from their century farm near Bolton where, in 1932, great-grandfather Stewart Mellow began farming with his herd of Jersey cows.

Now, his great grandson, Curtis Ruta, Curtis' mother Carol Ruta and uncle Bruce Mellow, along with grandparents Robert and Elaine Mellow, are managing and milking not only their herd of registered Jerseys, but also the Holsteins that were purchased with the Oxford County farm in early 2023.



From left, Curtis Ruta, Carol Ruta and Bruce Mellow of Glenholme Jerseys Inc., who recently moved from the Bolton Area of Peel County to the 18th Line of Oxford's East-Zorra Township Township and expanded their family's dairy operation, are pictured as one of their Jersey Cows looks on. Contributed photo

They are now milking 109 cows in their double-eight milking parlour, while their

cows housed in free stalls are fed a mixed ration of forages, grains and concentrates

balanced for maximum production and good health.

Curtis, 25, has always shown a keen interest in milking and exhibiting heifers and cows with his mother and uncle at various local fairs and even the Royal Winter Fair in Toronto.

While showing dairy calves in the 4-H program, he had always hoped he could follow in his family's footsteps to be a dairy farmer.

With their 170-acre farm on prime Oxford County soil, they hope to grow alfalfa and corn to feed their herd of registered cows and heifers.

Since making the move from Peel County, they are pleased with their production of 5-per-cent butterfat and high-protein content from their mixed Holstein and Jersey herd.

They are proud to offer their genetics in a TAG sale this weekend where they will offer for sale 38 animals off the top of their well-established herd of registered Jerseys.

For more information about the sale, email Curtis at cruta1932@gmail.com or call 647-201-7538.

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FARM EDITION 2024 —

Green Acre Farms producing high-quality milk and chicken in Perth County and Waterloo Region



Brendan, Samantha and two-month old Ava Wagler help manage the Perth County dairy herd of Green Acre Farms on the western edge of Punkeydoodle's Corners. Contributed photo



From left, Tim, Gary, David and Andrew Wagler are pictured inside their dairy barn south of New Hamburg. Contributed photo

By Gary West

If you were like me in the late 60s and watched the TV show, Green Acres, you might have thought of a farm south of New Hamburg that goes by the name Green Acre Farms Ltd.

The TV show was a success story and so is the farm. The Wagler family, which includes Gary, his two sons, David and Andrew, his brother, Tim, and nephew, Brendan, farm in a picturesque part of Waterloo Region near the Perth and Oxford county borders in New Hamburg.

Farming runs deep in the Wagler Family, which now milks registered Holsteins on two different farms in Waterloo Region and Perth County.

They not only milk more than 200 cows, but also manage thousands of broiler chickens and young chicken pullets that are raised to become laying hens for the egg market.

After graduating from Waterloo-Oxford District Secondary School, both Gary and Tim came home to milk cows with their father and mother, Lloyd and Ruby, on their 100-acre farm on the Huron road.

Skip ahead to 2006 when the next generation came into the business and felt that expanding the dairy operation was in their future.

A new state-of-the-art dairy barn was built and, for 17 years, the double-10 parallel milking parlour and free-stall area worked well for this family farm.

In 2023, a major shift took place as milking robots were installed at both facilities to ease labour demands and also have their cows milked more than twice a day as their production was reaching 45 litres per day with a 4.4 butterfat test.

The family grows hundreds of acres of corn, soybeans, alfalfa and wheat, and what isn't fed to their animals is sold on the futures market.

They also serve their community in both church and as members of various committees.

If the future of producing quality milk and chicken can be attributed to the two local Green Acre farms, rest assured that the Wagler family will continue to take pride in what they do best.



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FARM EDITION 2024 —

Your Farm Your Family | Your Success

Recognizing Farmers During Canadian Agricultural Safety Week March 10 to 16, 2024



Celebrating Ag Safety Week: Safety is Our Heritage

By Wilmot-Tavistock Gazette staff

Canadian Agricultural Safety Week takes place March 10-16 and this year farmers, farm families, farm workers and farming communities are encouraged to consider how they plan for #FarmSafetyEveryday.

Canadian Agricultural Safety Week (CASW) is an annual national initiative delivered by the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association (CASA) that raises awareness about the importance of safe agriculture.

Your Farm, Your Family, Your Success: Safety is Our Heritage is the final part of a three-year safety campaign. This year, organizers are focusing on providing practical safety advice and encouraging conversations about farm safety while showcasing how safety directly contributes to the success and sustainability of farming operations.

"There is no question that farm accidents can have a devastating toll with physical, psychological and financial consequences," said CASA CEO Andrea Lear in a press release. "But we also know that many on-farm incidents are preventable. That's why we want to provide Canadian producers with the tools and resources they need to protect the health and safety of everyone who lives and works on or visits farms and ranches.

"Canadian Agricultural Safety Week serves as a reminder that farm safety is important year-round and that by working together, we can ensure a safer agricultural sector."

Every year, CASA raises awareness about the importance of safety on Canadian farms through CASW, which takes place during the third week of March. This year's sponsors are CN, Syngenta Canada, Canadian Canola Growers Association, Fertilizer Canada and Parrish & Heimbecker.

Additional information about CASW, including the media kit and resources, is available at agsafetyweek.ca. The media kit contains feature stories, safety advice articles, public-service announcements, graphics and more.

The Canadian Agricultural Safety Association is a national, non-profit organization dedicated to improving the health and safety of farmers, their families and agricultural workers. CASA is funded in part by the Government of Canada under the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership, a federal, provincial and territorial initiative. For more information, visit www.casa-acsa.ca, find us on Facebook or LinkedIn, or follow us on X @planfarmsafety.



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FARM EDITION 2024 —

Nith Valley Apiaries: More than a century of local honey

By Galen Simmons

Since 1918, Nith Valley Apiaries has provided local honey to New Hamburg and area residents from the idyllic little farm at the bend in Christner Road on the banks of the Nith River.

Over the past century, the apiary has been handed down through four successive owners – each of whom learned from but were not related by blood to the beekeeper before them – until it landed in the hands of Mike and Erika Roth, who own and operate the 800-hive operation today.

“From father-in-law to son-in-law was the closest it got to being passed on to someone in the same family. I’m not related to (any of the previous owners),” said Mike Roth, who began working at Nith Valley Apiaries as an informal apprentice when he was 16.

“There is starting to be some ... certification to beekeeping now, but it has been a really antique industry in that sense. It’s a very small niche. Honey is a very safe product to work with, needing little oversight, and the industry as a whole has flown under the radar in many aspects. There’s basically just requirements for what needs to be (printed) on a jar of honey.”

While Mike Roth says the biggest threat to the honey industry in Canada is imported honey that has been cut with cane or rice sugar, beekeeping as a form of agriculture hasn’t scaled up to the industrial level like other agricultural practices have, leaving smaller businesses like Nith Valley Apiaries as the only options for local-honey lovers across the country.

Part of the reason beekeeping hasn’t been taken over by big business is the number of hard-to-control, outside influences that affect honey production and the overall health of honeybees.

“We had about 800 hives going into winter and, so far, it looks like we’ll have most of them this spring,” Mike Roth said. “By most, I’d say we’re looking at roughly 20 per-cent loss which, traditionally, pre 1990s, a 20-per-cent loss was quite high, and now 20 per-cent loss is pretty good.



Mike and Erika Roth (pictured) and the team at Nith Valley Apiaries in New Hamburg work hard year-round to ensure their 800 hives of honeybees are healthy and collect as much nectar from local flowers as possible each summer. Photo by Galen Simmons

Twenty to 30 per cent, I think, is considered average now and 40 and 50 per-cent losses are not unusual. They definitely hurt, but beekeepers seem to experience them in different pockets of the province every year.”

From the destruction of honeybees’ natural environment and local farmers harvesting crops before they go to flower, thereby limiting the bees’ available food sources, to extreme weather and changes in climate, and the dangers of disease and parasites, beekeepers like Mike and Erika Roth work tirelessly to ensure their bees have what they need to overcome all the threats they face.

“It’s a complicated situation where we’ve just added layer upon layer of stress for the bees,” Mike Roth said. “We don’t really know where they go and they’re exposed to unknown chemicals from industry. Their food source; we might say it’s wildflower honey, but what’s left that’s actually wild? It’s almost all cultivated and there’s way less diversity than what they would experience normally. So, you have a lot of exposures, a poorly balanced diet and then global pests and diseases like the varroa mites.

“Which straw broke the camel’s back, right?”

For the Roths, ensuring their bees are healthy enough to make it through the winter so they can collect nectar and turn it into honey through spring, summer and into the fall is the name of the game.

Beekeeping, Mike Roth says, is somewhat akin to gambling. It’s about knowing when to introduce a little extra food and probiotics in their diets to tide them over until the flowers bloom or to ensure they have enough calories to survive the winter; when to spray for varroa mites so the heat of the day won’t put the bees at risk by causing the time-controlled natural or chemical miticides to release too quickly; and when to divide a colony before it swarms and leaves the hive while minimizing the impact to the colony’s overall honey production.

The product of all that hard work put in by the Roths, their team and – of course – the bees, is a range of honeys as well as honey byproducts like beeswax, honeycomb and bee pollen turned into consumer goods and sold by the Roths from their on-farm shop.

From wildflower honey and clover honey

to buckwheat honey, basswood honey and huckleberry swamp honey, the latter of which is collected by bees from a wetland north of Stratford, the Roths and their team can tell where their bees are foraging by the taste and colour of the honey they produce, something they say many of their customers can discern, too.

“There’s three months to make your honey crop (June, July and August),” Mike Roth said. “Typically, we get 130-150 pounds of honey per colony, per year. That comes in fits and spurts. You’ll get a flush of dandelion nectar that comes in, then there’s the dogwoods and wild apples like hawthorns and locust (trees). Honey has colour grading to help classify it. It’s up to the beekeepers to determine the floral source as they want to.

“August, the last couple of years, has not been a big honey month, but it can be. June and July have a lot of natural flowers and August is basically all agricultural sources. If the hay fields aren’t left to bloom in August, there’s not much honey.”

While the world of beekeeping is certainly more complicated than it was 100 years ago, Mike Roth says he is thankful for the advances in apiary technology that allow the small Nith Valley team to manage the number hives they have.

“It’s easy to complain about the global, industrialized society, but ... (today) welders are so common, small farms – us included – have one in the shop and we can fix whatever broken, metal thing we need in a flash. Go back 50-100 years, if some piece of metal broke, you’d have to take it to someone to get it fixed. The technology we have at our fingertips is incredible. Consumer-accessibility to technologies that, 50 years ago, were reserved for industry and special training has grown exponentially,” Mike Roth said.

“It’s really hard to know if we’ve gone forwards or backwards (in beekeeping), but (the issues we face) are definitely different than they were in 1918.”

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FARM EDITION 2024 —

Zorra Township couple wins 2024 ag. award

By Lee Griffi, Local Journalism Initiative reporter

Cobi and Steve Sauder have dedicated their lives to outdoor education and conservation. As a result, the couple has been awarded the prestigious Oxford Stewardship Award.

The couple stood out to the award-selection committee for their long list of stewardship projects at their 100-acre farm in Zorra Township. They have planted an estimated 6,500 trees since purchasing their property nearly 30 years ago. Oxford County Warden Marcus Ryan presented the award at a recent Oxford County council meeting.

Cobi Sauder says they have always taken pride in being good caretakers and land stewards.

"We felt privileged to be afforded the opportunity to live on a 100-acre farm, so we just wanted to give back to it. Once you live within it and immerse yourself, you just get connected with all the different plant species and all the different possibilities, so it just made sense to us to be as kind as we could to the land."

Steve Sauder adds the farm is an extension of who they are.

"We met while teaching outdoor education and we just have a real love for the land. It was also an extension of who I was at work because we were always promoting conservation, and it was just a great opportunity to live the things about improving water quality and soil health."

The couple has been working towards improving their farm operation over time, performing no-till and minimal-till crop rotations since the 1990s and planting cover crops over the past six years. Steve



Oxford Warden Marcus Ryan presenting the award to Cobi and Steve Sauder. Photo courtesy of Oxford County.

Sauder says they always look for ways to improve soil health.

"We wanted a productive working farm, so our goal has been to continue to learn and take care of our soil as best as we can."

Tree planting has been an ongoing project over the years, and they estimate they have planted over 6,500 since purchasing the property. The couple has established a wooded area with tree diversity, buffered

a wetland, and planted windbreaks.

Cobi Sauder says they wanted to make the property accessible for their kids to give them room to explore.

"The kids were always playing outside in the bush or out back exploring and it just made sense to involve them in the process. All our girls are now working in the sciences, influenced by immersing themselves in nature from a young age. The property backs onto the conservation

area and there are lots of places to explore and learn."

Steve Sauder added they have also removed a lot of invasive species from the property and recently installed deer enclosure fencing.

"Species diversification is important to us. Working at reducing invasive species; we have worked with Oxford County to reduce glossy buckthorn from the farm as well as on the deer enclosures to help improve the woodlot health at the back and prevent the deer from eating all of the new vegetation."

Working with Oxford County, the Sauders installed deer enclosures to help reduce invasive species and help improve the woodlot health at the back of their property by preventing the deer from eating all of the new vegetation. They also plant cover crops at their farm, have decommissioned an old well, and created water and sediment control basins.

The couple received a \$500 gift certificate to purchase original artwork commissioned from an Oxford County artist of their choice. In addition to this prize, Cobi and Steve Sauder have been added to the recognition wall at the Oxford County administration building, designed to honour all past and future recipients.

The runner-ups were Paul Brenneman from the Township of East Zorra-Tavistock and Marsha and Gregg Litt from Zorra.

The Oxford Stewardship Award recipient is chosen by Stewardship Oxford and the Oxford Soil and Crop Improvement Association from the pool of projects that received financial and/or technical assistance through the county-supported Clean Water Program the previous year.

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FARM EDITION 2024 —



The Tavistock Hop Company

By Galen Simmons

For lovers of craft beer, there is always joy to be had when exploring a new town or city and discovering what local breweries have on tap.

For those who discover the myriad craft breweries in Tavistock, Stratford, Shakespeare, St. Marys and the surrounding region, that joy is doubled when they learn the hops that add that distinctive floral, spicy, piney, citrusy, herbal, tropical, woody, earthy or downright hoppy flavour to their favourite local brews were grown right down the road at The Tavistock Hop Company.

“We’ve got a small acreage. We’ve got 30 workable (acres) ... and we were looking for something we could do on a small bit of land,” said Kyle Wynette, who owns and operates The Tavistock Hop Company with wife Julie Wynette and business partners Jeremy and Donna Bartlett from their family farm, Brenwyn Farms, on Perth Line 26 in Perth East, just outside Tavistock. “We wanted to do something a little different. We were looking for a challenge. ... We decided, ‘Ok, let’s try growing hops on a small plot,’ and then friends of ours said, ‘Ok, we’ll go in. Do you want business partners?’

“Currently between the two (families), we have five boys who can all help. We’re lucky. We also get eight to 10 students who come from Tavistock and help out. They work a lot in May-June, and then nothing in July until harvest when we work straight for two weeks.”

In the midst of a massive resurgence as a crop

in Ontario thanks to the craft-beer movement, hops are the female flower cone of the plant, *Humulus lupulus*. These cones are used primarily in the brewing process to impart bitterness, aromas and flavours in addition to acting as a natural preservative.

First cultivated in Germany, hops are now farmed throughout Europe, in northeastern and northwestern parts of the U.S. and in parts of Canada including B.C., Quebec, the Maritime provinces and Ontario. Commercial hops are primarily grown on tall trellis systems reaching heights of 12-20 feet depending on the trellis design. The female flower of the plant is what’s used for the process of making beer and there are many different varieties (or cultivars), each with their own unique brewing and growing characteristics.

Like the grape-growing regions of the world and wine produced in those regions, hops take on the characteristics of their surroundings and may have unique flavours depending on the regions, soil and climate in which they’re grown.

Based on the soil on their farm and the local climate, the Wynettes and the Bartletts grow nine different varieties of hops including cascade, centennial, hallertauer, glacier, alpharoma, chinook, triple perle, nugget and heritage, the latter of which is a hop recovered from the former Preston Hop Yards in Waterloo Region and now grown only by The Tavistock Hop Company. While the more common cascade hops are standard in IPAs with their mango- and citrus-flavour

Continued on page 27

Tavistock Hop Company business partners Kyle Wynette and Jeremy Bartlett stand in their hops field on Perth Line 26 in Perth East, just outside of Tavistock. Contributed photo



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FARM EDITION 2024 —

A journey from farm to keg

Continued from page 26

profiles, New Zealand's alpharoma hop is commonly used in pale ales, lagers and IPAs for its aromas of stone fruit, red licorice and grassy notes.

"A cascade grown here is going to taste different than a cascade grown out in the Pacific northwest," Kyle Wynette said. "We've got a couple different soil structures on the property (including) a sandy soil (and one that's more) clay-loam. It was the luck of the draw when we bought the farm, but you have to cater to it. You might have to water more on your sandy soils and less on your heavier, clay soils."

Since hop plants are a perennial species, they require a period of dormancy of roughly six to eight weeks during winter. For The Tavistock Hop Company, the season starts in April – weather permitting – with field prep, trellis maintenance and fertilization followed by stringing the coir, a coconut-fibre rope that guides the hop plants to the top of the trellis as they grow.

"Once stringing is completed, usually by May long weekend, we begin training the hops onto the strings," Kyle Wynette said. "Most of the hops tend to do this themselves – they wrap clockwise around the coir – but some varieties benefit from additional help. Harvest gets underway mid-August and continues to the first week of September. Our hops are picked, dried (for 12-14 hours), pelletized and packaged on site before moving to cold storage to await brewer orders."

As one of only a handful of hop growers in Ontario, The Tavistock Hop Company's final product is in high demand by both local commercial brewers and those from farther afield. Locally, Tavistock hops

are used by Upper Thames Brewing in Woodstock, Black Swan Brewing in Stratford, Broken Rail Brewing in St. Marys, Shakespeare Brewing Company in Shakespeare, Peel St. Beverage Company in New Hamburg and Mad Mash Brewing in Tavistock.

Further out, Tavistock hops are used by commercial brewers in Elmira, Toronto, Petrolia, Goderich, Georgina, Caledon and even a few across the border in the U.S.

"We've sold hops as far south as San Diego, but we don't sell a lot in the states," Kyle Wynette said. "The biggest brewery we've worked with is probably Sleeman's. That was last year and we did a century pale ale with them. ... They're looking for two things. One, a brewer wants to support local, Ontario agriculture and Canadian agriculture because most of the hops come from the U.S. still. Also, you see breweries saying, 'We want a closer relationship with where our ingredients are coming from that we might not get through a broker. I think that appeals to some of them.'"

In addition to selling hops to commercial brewers, The Tavistock Hop Company also offers home-brewer packages with 4 ounces of the company's more popular, pelletized hops available for small-batch beers.

Regardless of whether they brew at home or in a large-scale commercial brewery, Kyle Wynette said The Tavistock Hop Company's customers often visit from far and wide to see and smell the hops growing in the field for themselves and, for some limited-run wet-hop beers, purchase them as soon as they're harvested.

For more information about The Tavistock Hop Company, visit www.tavihops.ca.



Hops are the female flower cone of the plant, *Humulus lupulus*, and are used primarily in the brewing process to impart bitterness, aromas and flavours in addition to acting as a natural preservative. Contributed photo

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