

December 2016 \$8.00

Better Farming

SOARING
HYDRO COSTS

12



CORN HYBRIDS

Planning for 2017

40

RESISTANT WEEDS

Problem Solving

48

OAD MILKING

Production Results

30

ALUS CANADA

Conservation Projects

27



RUDY HEEMAN

WINTER MAINTENANCE

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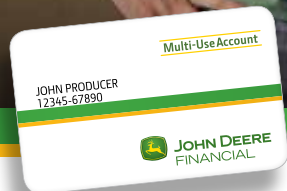
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Main Feature

Cover

12 THE RISING COST OF HYDROELECTRIC POWER ON THE FARM

Do farmers get value for their money? Can they reduce costs? *Better Farming* investigates.

Features

27 GO ASK ALUS

ALUS Canada has been growing quickly over the past 10 years, and it is now on the verge of further expansion. *Better Farming* takes a look at the organization at this critical juncture.

30 THE APPEAL OF ONCE-PER-DAY MILKING

Milking just once every 24 hours cuts milk output per cow. But the strategy also slashes production costs and seems to produce longer-living, healthier cattle as well as more free time for milkers.

40 SELECTING NEXT YEAR'S CORN HYBRID

Seed companies offer a variety of incentives to farmers who place their orders before the end of the year. Consider trial data and your relationship with your dealer when ordering your seed.

48 STOP SPREADING WEEDS

You need to be proactive to reduce the spread of resistant weeds. Here are some tips.

Departments

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 4 Behind the Lines | 40 Crops |
| 4 Farm Weather Report | 50 How it Works |
| 6 Short Takes | 53 Machinery At Work |
| 24 Field Trip | 55 The Hill |
| 33 Up Close | 57 Far Afield |
| 38 Better Business | 70 Rural Roots |



12



24



27



30



BEHIND THE LINES A year of change

For many of us, December is the time to reflect on past accomplishments and look towards new plans and opportunities. I think this is partially related to the seasonal nature of crop production; fall harvest is complete and we reflect on what worked – and perhaps what didn't – as we start to shape our production plans for 2017. As columnist **Dale Cowan** highlights in his article, after all, now is the time to try and place spring seed orders to try to take advantage of discounts!

2016 has certainly been a year of change for me. I successfully defended my PhD dissertation in agricultural history, finishing off my formal graduate education. (But always eagerly looking for the next learning opportunity.) I also took on a more active role in the management of my family farm operation.

The biggest change, of course, has been my move into the role of managing editor of *Better Farming* and *Better Pork*. The role allows me to combine my life-long passions for agriculture and writing.

While I've always been active in the farming community, I've been so pleased by the kindness and support of our readers. I had a blast earlier this fall, connecting with many of you at **Canada's Outdoor Farm Show**, and, more recently, at the **Ontario Federation of Agriculture's** annual general meeting.

A number of you, too, have reached out by email or social media to share some of your thoughts and suggestions. **Ken Grubb**, a cash crop farmer, for example, suggested the addition of the page numbers on the front cover – which allows our busy readers to find articles more quickly.

Rudy Heeman also kindly shared detailed information on his family's agri-tourism operation, allowing senior writer **Mary Baxter** to delve into the issue of soaring hydro costs in this month's main feature.

So, as we move towards the end of 2016, on behalf of all of us at *Better Farming*, thanks for all of your support. We look forward to continuing our discussions in the new year – and beyond. **BF**

ANDREA M. GAL

FARM WEATHER REPORT

Rainfall variations across Ontario

Overall, Ontario rainfall typically remained below the 30-year average between May 1 and publication time.

There were, however, some notable variations across the province. At one extreme, the Windsor area received 616.9 mm of rain in those 26 weeks, versus its 30-year average of 495.2 mm for the same timeframe. Of this year's rainfall, 130 mm fell during one event in Windsor. Peterborough, in contrast, experienced only 293.4 mm of rain, versus its 30-year average of 520 mm.

The drier weather has hurt crop yields in eastern Ontario as well as the Niagara area.

In Essex County, in contrast, the excess rain delayed the harvest of an average to above-average corn crop. The excess precipitation, along with warmer than normal temperatures, contributed to ear molds – which caused quality issues and some corn downgrading at elevators.

Winter wheat stands are average to good with some waterlogged fields in the southwestern part of the province. **BF**

Dale Cowan, CCA-ON, 4 R NMS, is a senior agronomist with AGRIS Wanstead Cooperatives. Data from WIN and the Ag Grower Daily Dashboard Program.



photos: pdv/Stock/Getty Images Plus/Photo

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The business of Ontario agriculture

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Parasite-fighting soybeans will help producers

Finally, a variety that promises a new way to stop parasites in their tracks.

Researchers designed and patented a new type of soybean that can fight back against nematode parasitic infestations, according to a **Kansas State University** press release.

Parasites rely on a certain gene in the crop to survive; the new variety will silence that gene and, therefore, halt nematode reproduction.

This form of defence is “more durable and broadly applicable than traditional resistance,” **Timothy Todd**, instructor of plant pathology at Kansas State, said in the release.

Soybean cyst nematodes are the number one biotic limiter on soybean yields in Ontario, says **Owen Wally**, research scientist at **Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada** (AAFC).

“The good news is that most of the

varieties grown in Ontario are resistant,” says Wally. “That being said, (they’re) not perfect; the nematodes can adapt.

“There’s always a need for new sources of (nematode) resistance.”

Nematode infestations first appeared in Ontario in the Chatham-Kent region. Infestations have since spread east and west into cooler growing regions, says Wally.

Wally encourages producers to continue using resistant varieties while keeping up with crop rotations and adjusting rotation lengths based on the degree of infestation. A two- to three-year soybean rotation is standard in Ontario. Under high nematode pressure, however, producers should introduce a four- to five-year rotation, says Wally.

Producers can visually inspect plant roots or send soil samples to AAFC to determine nematode presence or severity. **BF**



Yelena Yemchuk/Creative RF/Getty Images photo

High hopes for biochar in Ontario

A study by **University of Waterloo** (UW) researchers may finally settle the question of whether charcoal could be a go-to additive to foster healthy crops in Ontario.

Biochar is charcoal made by burning organic matter at high temperatures with low oxygen levels, according to a university release.

Maren Oelbermann, an associate professor at UW, is leading a study on the effects of biochar on soil health, carbon sequestration, greenhouse gas emissions and climate change resilience. She’s also determining the social and economic factors affecting farmers’ use of biochar.

The study was recently funded by the **Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs** (OMAFRA).

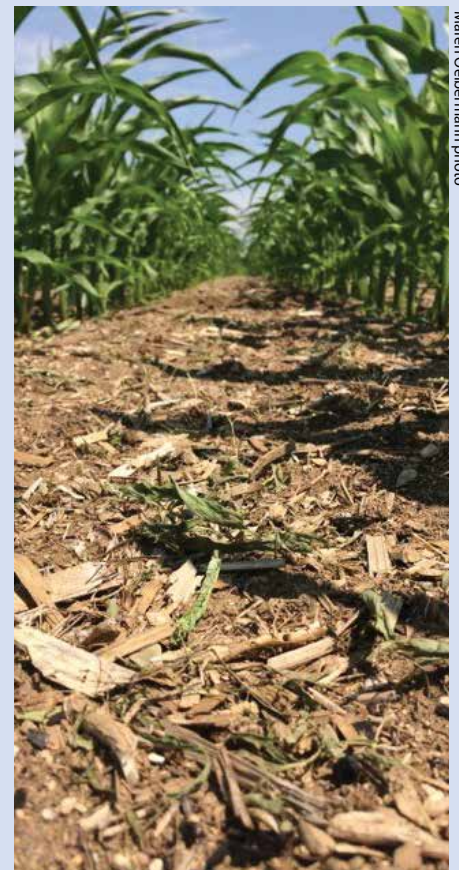
In tropical soils – where its use originated – biochar increases the soil pH, decreases aluminum toxicity and, therefore, makes nutrients more available for crops.

“However, temperate soils (like in Ontario) have a higher pH, higher soil organic matter and plant nutrient content, high-activity clays and lower oxide contents and, therefore, will respond differently to biochar than tropical soils,” explains Oelbermann. “This is one of the reasons why we initiated this research trial.”

Oelbermann said she hopes that biochar will increase soil fertility, nutrient uptake ability and microbial activity. She hypothesizes it may lead to healthier crops more resilient to drought.

Biochar – if successful in Ontario – could lessen nitrogen applications. Farmers could even produce their biochar from livestock waste, says Oelbermann.

“This is a very unique opportunity for the province of Ontario as well as its agricultural producers. There really have been no replicated trials using biochar previously in Ontario.” **BF**



Maren Oelbermann photo

FARMS AND FOOD FOREVER

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) recently refreshed its strategic plan to guide the organization's activities over the next three years. The plan includes a new, simplified mission – ***Farm and Food Forever.***

OFA's vision for Ontario agriculture includes a world where:

- ✓ Farming is a science based, technologically savvy industry
- ✓ Food and renewable agriculture-based products are produced sustainably
- ✓ Farmers are proud of their role, contributing to and advocating with OFA
- ✓ Consumers are knowledgeable of and engaged with the food system
- ✓ Nutritious Ontario food is readily available to Ontarians and enjoyed around the world

Read the full OFA strategic plan at www.ofa.on.ca

OFA: 80 years of advocating for Ontario agriculture.



New Hydro One response team



A new **Hydro One** farm rapid response team will streamline the sometimes lengthy and complicated process of solving stray voltage or other on-farm electrical issues.

Just don't expect the team to help you figure out your billing issues, say those operating the new service.

Introduced in September, the team is the result of the combined effort of the electrical service

provider and the **Ontario Federation of Agriculture**.

"In the past there has always been a bit of a void that farmers can find themselves in (with regard to stray voltage issues)," says **Daniel Levitan**, Hydro One director of external relations. "That's what we're trying to fill with this group."

The service has a dedicated toll-free phone number (1-888-405-3778) and a page on the Hydro One website. After contacting the service, farmers complete a one-page form and then are put in touch with the stray voltage specialist in their area who reviews the problem and does testing.

An engineer from Hydro One's lines group audits test results and provides "a second set of eyes," says Levitan.

The utility will create a central database of stray voltage incidents and solutions to share with others in the sector to build knowledge about the issue.

Hydro One receives 150 to 200 calls annually about the issue, says **Tony VandenBoomen**, who manages the team. "With the increased awareness and quicker response, I believe the number may climb," he says. **BF**

New spud offers exciting grower possibilities

A new potato to Ontario markets demonstrates opportunities that can develop from consumer trends.

The variety, **Carisma**, is produced with diabetic and health-conscious consumers in mind, according to **Len Brackenbury**, field manager at **EarthFresh Foods** in Waterdown.

The potato has a lower glycemic response than other starches.

"With **Carisma**, we're able to provide potatoes to a market that hasn't been purchasing potatoes before," says Brackenbury. "Potato consumption is falling year after year; this is a way we can gain it back."

EarthFresh is the exclusive Canadian grower, supplier and packager but plans to contract other growers. "This, apart from the glycemic index, is a good potato. Good skin finish, good yields, a good yellow variety," notes Brackenbury.

"There's a lot of innovation in the industry. There will be a push toward health attributes in potatoes; it's the latest interest."

This innovation results from consumer education, says **Vanessa Currie**, potato research technician at the **University of Guelph**. "Everyone along the value chain is interested in educating the consumer on varieties and quality.

"The industry continues to be driven by customer demand; growers will need to be nimble in trying new varieties and adopting new technologies," says Currie.

Carisma was developed in the Netherlands, according to the **EarthFresh** website. **BF**



npantos/Creative RF/Getty Images photo

The onion's perceived health benefits

It's time for farmers to think about planting more onions, says a **University of Guelph** researcher who is spearheading a new method to extract the humble vegetable's most healthful ingredient.

Suresh Neethirajan, principal investigator in the university's **Bionanotechnology Laboratory**, says his engineering team's research shows quercetin extractions from certain onions can kill colon cancer cells.

Quercetin is a flavonoid, an antioxidant thought to produce an anti-inflammatory effect and to benefit immune systems.

Neethirajan says the university's extraction process uses superheated high-pressure, steam-based water

technology. Other techniques leave behind chemical residues that make extractions unfit to use as food additives or in biopharmaceutical compounds. The university's process doesn't leave any harmful residues behind.

The approach is ready to be taken into commercial production, he says. "We have established a proof of concept. We have a framework," says Neethirajan.

Jason Verkaik, who grows onions at his **Carron Farms Ltd.** in the Holland Marsh and is chair of the **Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association**, estimates Ontario producers grow 7,000-plus acres of onions. These vegetables supply the

domestic market for most of the year and are also exported along the Eastern Seaboard.

He says demand for onions has remained constant but will grow as Ontario populations with South and Southeast Asian and Middle and Far East roots grow. **BF**



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Artisanal chicken program

Thinking of getting into the poultry industry? Now may be the time, thanks to the introduction of the **Chicken Farmers of Ontario's** (CFO) Artisanal Chicken Program.

"Traditionally, there have (mostly) been large-scale commercial opportunities," says **Michael Edmonds**, director of communications for CFO. "Our board felt, having reviewed the market and looked at requests from

smaller farmers, there was an opportunity."

This first year, the program included 100 farmers province-wide, according to Edmonds. These farmers served a wide array of markets, including specialty butcher shops and farmers markets.

"All of these farmers are not new necessarily to farming, but are new to chickens; they didn't see an opportu-

nity before," says Edmonds.

The program aims to provide both a market for farmers and products for consumers. "We think we met most of the goals we were trying to reach" in our first year, says Edmonds.

Northern Ontario was one target of the program, as the area traditionally lacked chicken farmers, says Edmonds. "A large number of farmers were able to start up operations in northern areas. The farmers (involved in the program) are well distributed across the province; this is important to us.

"We expect the program to grow even more next year."

The program accepts applicants who raise between 600 and 3,000 chickens and have passed an audit for food safety and animal welfare concerns.

Interested producers can contact CFO to learn more about the program and its application process. **BF**



ahaveaar/Creative RF/Getty Images photo

Spotlight on the International Year of Pulses

Since the **United Nations** declared 2016 the International Year of Pulses, it seems fitting that *Better Farming* provides a year-end review of pulse production in Ontario. Perhaps producers will have reason to incorporate these crops into their rotations as world-wide demand for these plant-based proteins grows.

"Pulse crops include dry beans, dry peas, lentils and chickpeas and deserve to be celebrated," says **Jennifer Mitchell**, project coordinator for **Ontario Bean Growers**. These crops "have a low carbon footprint and require less water and fertilizer than other crops."

This year, Ontario growers produced some 60,000 acres of dry beans – an average amount of acres for the province, according to the **Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs**.

But this season had been a particularly tough one for bean growers,

resulting in yield losses of approximately 15 to 20 per cent due to the extreme heat and dry weather, according to Mitchell.

Amongst a variety of coloured dry beans, Ontario farmers mostly grow white and black beans.

In terms of other pulses, "field pea production is increasing in northern Ontario due to an outbreak of swede midge in canola," says Mitchell. "Growers needed a profitable, cool

season crop as a replacement or supplement to canola in the rotation."

The largest markets for Canadian-grown pulses include India, China, Turkey, Bangladesh and the United States. Specifically, past drought conditions in India, and increased food manufacturing demand in China have supplied stronger export opportunities for Canada, **Pulse Canada** said in an email. **BF**



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THE POWER TO MAKE THINGS GROW

THE RISING COST OF HYDROELECTRIC POWER ON THE FARM

Do farmers get value for their money? Can they reduce costs?
Better Farming investigates.



Rudy Heeman and his family own and operate the Heeman's Garden Centre and Strawberry Farm in Middlesex County near London. He's holding one of the family farm operation's monthly bills. The cost of electricity is rising at this farm, as it is across most other farms in Ontario.

by MARY BAXTER

Heeman's Garden Centre and Strawberry Farm east of London paid on average 18.9 cents per-kilowatt-hour all-in (the per-kilowatt-hour rates, delivery, regulatory and debt-retirement charges and HST) for the electricity it received in April 2014.

Two years later, the farm was paying 24 cents all-in for that same kilowatt hour.

"If this was the cost of hydro, I think we could, we would accept" the price escalation, says Rudy Heeman. He operates the popular agri-tourism business his parents started in the 1960s with other family members. "But when we see windmills going up and shut down this plant and shut down that plant and just waste money, that's when we really (ask), 'Why are we paying this?'"

No matter where they are in Ontario, farmers are seeing their electrical bills soar. Anger mounts on the province's back roads. In September, despite recent announcements of provincial measures to reduce hydro bills, people attending the International Plowing Match and Rural Expo in Wellington County expressed their displeasure by booing Premier Kathleen Wynne when she appeared in the match's parade. And signs calling for the departure of Wynne and her federal Liberal colleague Prime Minister Justin Trudeau have appeared along at least one main road in Middlesex County.

Some businesses, including farm businesses, are choosing to take their expansions elsewhere. They implicate high utility costs in their relocation decisions. In January 2015, Leamington-based NatureFresh Farms, for example, announced plans to develop a 175-acre greenhouse in Delta, Ohio. "Contingent upon acceptable levels of incentives from the State of Ohio (and) other government authorities as well as utility rates agreeable to NatureFresh, the company would be poised to ship its first case of vegetables in December 2015," the company

said in a news release at the time.

Patrick Jilesen, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture's (OFA) director-at-large and a Bruce County sheep farmer who has close family ties to the pork industry, says hog producers tell him they will consider other jurisdictions when they are ready to expand. "The United States has a better opportunity right now than Ontario when it comes to electricity and those kinds of energy costs. That's a huge factor for a lot of operations."

At issue are the peak rates charged for power and the added costs of line delivery to rural areas. Rates charged in off-peak periods are similar to rates found in jurisdictions such as Michigan and Illinois, Jilesen says.

Peak demand rates, particularly in time-of-use accounts, are there to change behaviour when power is consumed. Yet, in containment livestock operations, "there's no opportunity to make that change, to shift that demand," he says. "In the summertime, when it gets warm during the day – and that begins right away in the morning – those fans come on. And there is no opportunity for those animals to change their behaviour. Quite frankly, it's almost inhumane to do that."

The launch of Ontario's carbon cap-and-trade system will also drive up energy prices even more, he predicts. Under the trading system that will launch in 2017, gas utilities and other large-scale carbon emitters must meet certain carbon caps or buy

emission allowances in auctions.

Already, gas companies are preparing customers for higher bills. Union Gas warns on its website of its intention to pass the increased costs along to customers.

Few see the recent round of provincial measures intended to address the problem as comprehensive solutions. "There's a strong faction out there that is still telling me the response that it's too little, too late, adding insult to injury, that sort of thing," says Ian Nokes, the OFA's energy and environmental economic policy analyst.

Certainly at Heeman's, the measures will produce negligible results. A residential rebate of the province's portion of the HST doesn't apply to Hydro One's general service energy account, the catch-all business classification that applies to Heeman's. And because it's classified as a general service account, the business also doesn't qualify for the rural and remote rate protection program that offsets the far higher costs of delivering electricity to areas of low population density. That subsidy, previously \$31.50 per month, increases to roughly \$55 a month, Nokes says.

Rural and remote rate protection will apply to the 68,260 farming accounts that fall under Hydro One's low-density residential classification. (Hydro One defines these customers as everyone who does not meet the terms of urban and medium-density zones: those who reside in areas with fewer than 100 customers and "less

FARM NUMBERS IN HYDRO ONE CLASSES

<i>Class</i>	<i>Number of farm accounts</i>
Residential – urban	248
Residential – medium density	7,155
Residential – low density	68,260
General service – energy	9,557
General service – demand	720
Sub-transmission	12

Numbers obtained from Hydro One

than 15 customers for every kilometre of power line used to supply energy in the zone.”)

The subsidy won't apply to the 7,155 farm accounts that fall under Hydro One's medium-density residential class or the 248 farm accounts in the residential – urban high-density class.

Nor will the Heemans' business qualify for the Industrial Conservation Initiative (ICI). Under this program, businesses obtain price reductions if they shift their peak to off-peak periods in the province. The Heeman operation's peak power use is at night and is already off-peak. But to qualify for the program, businesses must use on average at least one megawatt of peak power, which the Heeman farm, even in winter, doesn't come close to using.

Hydro One doesn't know how many farms will qualify for the ICI program. The utility “is currently in the qualifying period (from May 1,

2016, to April 30, 2017) which will determine how many farms will qualify,” says Nancy Clark, Hydro One spokesperson, in an e-mail.

Nokes says he's worried about farms that occupy the general service class. There is a danger these accounts will slip through the cracks of energy reform, he says.

If the farms use small amounts of electricity, they are billed either time-of-use or tiered rates. Tiered rates charge one price for the first 750 kWh per month and another price for kilowatt hours used over and above that amount. Businesses drawing more than 50 kW at any time during the month also get billed for the demand capacity of electricity they need, “so those people get billed on ensuring that they have capacity no matter when they use it,” he says.

According to EnerNOC's EnergySMART website, “a kilowatt is a measure of energy use at a given moment, not over time.” In contrast, a



The digital hydro meter at the Heeman farm is unable to transmit readings to the utility.

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kilowatt hour “is, in essence, a measure of total energy you use over a specific period of time, not at a given moment,” the website says. So, for example, “a 20-kW load used for one hour consumes 20 kWh,” says Ralph Winfield, a retired engineer and *Better Farming* contributor.

At the Heeman farm, power use sometimes registers below and other times above the 50-kW monthly-average-demand dividing line. How the family is charged – demand-billed or two-tier – is estimated annually. Differences between projected and actual use create adjustment charges.

The billing approach also creates unpredictability in charges. In 2014, for instance, the business received an adjustment charge of \$60,000. Clark says a glitch in a new Hydro One customer information system, along with the prolonged estimates applied to the business’s power use, was to blame. Both Heeman and Clark say the issue is resolved.

A key to preventing it from happening again, says Heeman, is regularly calling in the operation’s meter readings. (The digital meter can’t broadcast readings back to Hydro One, he says). Even with readings, the adjustments are unpredictable: in April 2015, Heeman received a \$45,000 bill; he subsequently worked with the utility to substantially reduce it.

Because the operation sometimes strays north of that 50-kW dividing line, it can’t qualify for time-of-use billing. “That’s not a pricing structure that’s used in demand billing,” Clark explains.

Heeman says the savings probably would be substantial if the farm did qualify (when its demand is below 50 kW), because the greenhouse operation’s greatest power needs are at night when time-of-use pricing is at its lowest rate. Tiered pricing does not take into account when power is used.

Nokes says he’d like to survey the OFA’s membership to determine what service types they’re under and what their energy profiles look like. He wants to identify farms that could be



The forced air furnace to the left is 250,000 BTU. To its right is the gas-powered water heater. That little box is 600,000 BTU. “That’s heating the water (for the Heeman greenhouse’s in-floor heat) and that’s 99 per cent efficient,” says Rudy Heeman.

able to take advantage of the ICI program and businesses like the Heemans’ that straddle different types of billing. Knowing the farms’ energy profiles will help him work with the Independent Electricity System Operator (IESO) and the Ontario Ministry of Energy to come up with other solutions.

One such solution could be a farm-industrial rate such as one in effect in British Columbia that exempts farmers from peak rates. Moreover, farmers can qualify for the B.C. Hydro program simply by supplying the utility with a copy of their property assessments. Farm business registration numbers could be used in Ontario, suggest Nokes and Jilesen.

“Those people (on general service who do what they can to reduce power consumption in their farm businesses) should get a pat on the back and get helped out,” says Nokes. “And even if they’re people that have an operation that can’t switch to night, then we need to make sure they’re doing everything they can, and then they should get a check box too.”

Just how much of a political will there is to address farming’s rising electrical rates remains to be seen. In the fall, the provincial government

announced consultations for a long-term energy plan that will wrap up in mid-December.

Julie Kwiecinski, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business’s (CFIB) provincial affairs director for Ontario, calls the plan development a good step. “But that’s not going to help a farmer right now who is drowning in his hydro bill,” she says. According to the Ministry of Energy’s website, the plan will establish directions for the province’s energy future for the next two decades.

Ministry of Energy spokespeople did not respond to *Better Farming* telephone calls and an e-mail.

Organizations such as the OFA, CFIB and the Ontario Chamber of Commerce have all said natural gas infrastructure in rural Ontario will help to ease the crisis in electrical costs. And in October, the OFA announced a partnership with the eastern and western Ontario wardens’ caucuses to lobby the provincial government to begin the infrastructure development.

“Our position is definitely that natural gas access will help people manage their electricity, and actually it’s our position that it will help us to get to the climate change targets for 2050,” Nokes says.

He points out that people in

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An example of the water lines for the in-floor heating system at the Heeman greenhouse operation.

remote areas who are being encouraged to manage their demand may turn to generators, and diesel fuel is

relatively cheap. But the fuel is dirty compared to natural gas. “I would much rather people have the ability to

fire up the cleanest fossil fuel possible to do that,” he says.

Natural gas proponents anticipate that this infrastructure will benefit all residents and businesses in rural Ontario, no matter their hydro account type. As of mid-October, however, the province had not yet released details of the \$230 million it had allocated in its budget for loans and grants to support gas-line extensions. Both of the province’s two utilities, however, did have extension proposals before the Ontario Energy Board.

And it will take years to get natural gas infrastructure in place. A farm industry rate, by way of contrast, could be faster to implement and could ease the costs that farms like Heeman’s – already on natural gas – incur on general service accounts.

Convincing decision makers far away from the farm community about the rate’s appropriateness will take

The trouble with global adjustment

If you used \$100 worth of electricity in 2015, then you spent only \$23 of your usage on the actual cost of the electricity. So what was the remaining \$77 spent on?

The global adjustment, says Julie Kwiecinski, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business’s provincial affairs director for Ontario.

Hydro One describes global adjustment as either “a credit or a charge to the customer to account for the difference between the spot price of electricity and the rates paid to various regulated and non-regulated generators across Ontario.” Among those “various regulated and non-regulated generators” are nuclear plants and hydroelectric generating stations, as well as contracted power generators such as renewable energy facilities and gas-fired facilities. The adjustment also covers the cost of delivering conservation programs.

Everyone pays the global adjustment. For those who use more than an average of 50 kilowatts a month and are on demand billing, the global adjustment appears as a separate line on the bill. For those who use less power, the adjustment is built into the per-kilowatt-hour time-of-use or tiered rates.

In a 2015 report, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce claimed medium-sized businesses that use an average hourly peak demand of more than 50 kW a month but less than three megawatts bear the brunt of this

adjustment. At that time, three MW marked the point that divided demand-billed customers into categories of Class A (above three MW) and Class B (everyone else). In September, the Ontario government reduced the minimum qualification for Class A to one MW peak demand.

Class A customers can qualify for the Industrial Conservation Initiative which reduces their share of the global adjustment when customers shift their peak demand to the province’s off-peak periods.

“In theory, that benefits everybody because Ontario as a whole, when they look at the market, they now see that as a whole Ontario’s peak has gone down a bit,” says Ian Nokes, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture’s energy and environmental economic policy analyst. “So if everybody could manage his or her peak use, then our overall peak goes down. And if it goes down, then that means we don’t have to have as much generation on the go (or) generation in the queue.”

But the reality, the chamber report asserts, is that a higher percentage of the global adjustment ends up being paid by Class B demand-billed customers.

Nokes says he’s concerned that many farm operations in the general service category are vulnerable to the impact of global adjustment. “I don’t want it to end up that our farmers are left in the dark,” he says. **BF**

numbers to quantify the benefits, Nokes says. "I can't just go to them and say, 'Give farmers a (lower) rate' because that means everyone in Toronto gets a slightly higher bill." The provincial government would face bad publicity.

How much a utility like Hydro One can do on its own about situations like the one that the Heeman family finds itself in also remains in question.

Clark says the utility's next steps would be to clarify how the business is billed and talk to the family about its future needs and what can be done.

Changing rates, however, is beyond Hydro One's control. Those are set up "with the (former) Ontario Energy Board (now IESO)," she says. So is the approach to demand metering?

Asked if the utility is able to talk to the IESO about the type of situation the Heemans find themselves in,

Clark says she would "have to take that back and look into it for sure. I know that is something that does come through both policy and regulation from the Ontario Energy Board."

Nevertheless, even if a 50+ kW peak draw comes only once a year,

someone has to pay. "That's where demand billing comes in," she says. "(Customers are) billed for both consumption as well as their highest peak because we need to have that electricity infrastructure in place to be able to deliver that power to them for that highest peak usage." **BF**



The Heemans recently installed a heat exchanger on their main retail greenhouse.

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Electrical energy for grain drying

On-farm options for corn drying have evolved significantly in the past 50 years. Now, due to high electricity costs, some farmers opt for combination systems.

by RALPH WINFIELD

We started drying corn and other grains on Ontario farms in the 1960s, primarily to avoid elevator lineups at harvest time. At that time, most farm electrical services were not large enough to power the most common standard-type batch grain dryers. These relatively small, usually round batch dryers were frequently powered by the PTO of a farm tractor.

In rural areas, propane (liquid petroleum gas or LPG) was most often used to heat the drying air. Two additional items were regularly included in these drying systems. A plywood- or tarpaulin-type enclosure was placed around the tractor to add the tractor heat (but not the tractor exhaust) to reduce propane used by the dryer. The other item was a set of Murphy gauges which were installed on the tractor to shut it down if the oil pressure dropped or the engine overheated. The extended air intake around the tractor to collect heat also had the benefit of reducing the entry of “red dust” into the dryer and

significantly decreasing the risk of fire in the dryer plenum.

The dried grain, primarily corn, was stored in small 2,000 – 5,000 bushel steel bins to feed livestock or for later sale.

In the 1970s, higher amperage services became available on most farms. Thus, up to a 25-horsepower (soft-start) or a 15-hp regular motor could be used on a single-phase

service. The soft-start motors, which provided a lower startup torque, could easily start dryer fans. Hydro was relatively cheap, and this concept worked very well for most on-farm systems. Many farms did not have three-phase power available that would allow them to exceed that 25-hp limit.

Customers were billed once their total electrical demand exceeded 50



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This older batch-type dryer that is PTO-powered by a tractor is still in use.

kilowatts (kW). Thus other activities could also be accomplished without incurring a demand charge. Aeration fan motors on those small bins were usually not more than two hp. If the electrical demand exceeded 50 kW, charges would only be applied for one month, as the meter reader reset the demand indicator during the regular monthly visit.

If on-farm drying systems did expand to effectively become commercial drying systems, three-phase power was a must. The drying system could be strategically located adjacent to a three-phase line or, with a capital contribution, three-phase lines could be extended to the desired farm site.

The cost of hydro

Up to the early 2000s, electrical energy was relatively cheap, and many relatively large on-farm drying systems appeared in Ontario. By 2010, the cost of extending three-phase service and the cost of electrical energy in Ontario increased significantly.

The option of generating electrical energy with natural gas as the engine/generator fuel needed consideration. One of the largest installations that I am aware of is in western Ontario. When a high-capacity screen-less type dryer was installed in 2009, a dedicated large V-12 natural gas engine which produced about 870 hp and powered a 600-kVA (kilovolt amp or about 500 kW) generator, was attached. This combination system directly provided all of

the electrical energy for that large screen-less dryer. All of the engine waste heat, as well as the exhaust gases, was directed into the air stream to the grain dryer to maximize energy efficiency.

This concept is not unique. As hydro rates continue to increase, along with the high delivery charges, many potential on-farm dryer operators are being encouraged by equipment suppliers to consider this type of combination system. However, many of these systems would be much smaller and could be wired/controlled so that the power system could also be used as a standby power system for the entire farm in the event of an outage or for use during the on-peak billing times.

It is important to note that these power systems cannot be used to feed the power grid. They would need to be synchronized and do not meet the requirements of Ontario's Green Energy Act. However, gas-fired electrical generation systems have been used for many decades as "peaking plants" by electrical power suppliers in Ontario and elsewhere.

Grain drying and handling progression

In the 50 years that I have been involved in grain drying in Ontario, many changes have occurred. As I noted earlier, the first on-farm grain drying appeared to help farmers avoid those persistent lineups at the local small

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commercial elevators. The “dryeration” process developed at Purdue University was among the first to be field tested in Ontario.

Hot dried corn was removed from the dryer when the moisture content (mc) measured between 16 and 18 per cent. Then the corn filled one of three tempering bins, usually concrete silos. The grain sat for about eight hours before a relatively large fan output of 0.5 cubic feet per minute (cfm) per bushel was blown up through the corn to remove the two-to-three points of moisture and cool the grain. That corn then had to be moved to another dry bin so the tempering bin could be reused.

Dryeration provided a high-quality output but required careful monitoring and an additional handling of the corn at a very busy period. New continuous flow dryers with a tempering section between the drying and cooling sections basically took over.

As fuel costs continued to rise, the concept of reclaiming the heat from the cooling section became popular and was very effective. However, the red dog released from the dry corn could be passed directly into the drying section through the burner. This fire hazard had to be eliminated by providing a settling chamber for the red dog. The collected red dog

could be taken to the field in a manure spreader, which eliminated the product from the drying area.

The next major progression was the introduction of screen-less dryers. They solved two major issues. Previously, corn over-dried when it flowed along the hot inside dryer screens. This process resulted in broken kernels and excessive unsaleable fines. Screen-less dryers solved these problems.

These screen-less dryers operated on a batch drop system. The airflow was stopped temporarily, and the red dog could be collected and diverted to a special bin for disposal.

Handling changes

It was often very difficult to convince a person who was planning to build a first drying system to (a) move the system away from the old livestock buildings on the site and (b) make provisions for the eventual inclusion of a leg elevator.

I still recommend both. Virtually every drying setup now has a large dump pit and at least one high-capacity leg elevator.

High-rate grain-handling capability is an absolute must to eliminate the pesky elevator lineups that plagued so many of us in days gone by!

In addition, that high-capacity leg elevator can also greatly reduce

load-out times for the grain trains moving dry product outbound.

One final thought

Would you have ever visualized a 200-hp motor on a leg elevator? They do exist and not just on the high-capacity elevators used to load and unload ships! **BF**



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Unique eastern Ontario livestock operation

After the sale of their Ayrshire cattle and quota, water buffalo seemed like an ideal business venture for this farming couple.

by JOE CALLAHAN



▲

Water buffalo grazing in the meadow at Ontario Water Buffalo Co. According to *Encyclopedia Britannica*, there are “74 breeds of domestic water buffalo.” In total, according to the American Water Buffalo Association, there are approximately 180 million water buffalo in the world, about 100 million of which are in India. Italy serves as a primary source for North American water buffalo, as well as breeding and technology expertise because the regulatory environment is similar to Canada’s. Most of Martin Littkemmann and Lori Smith’s herd are Italian Mediterranean.

After eastern Ontario dairy farmer Martin Littkemmann accepted an unplanned offer to purchase his herd of Ayrshires and accompanying quota in 2008, he was faced with a major question: what’s next?

The answer emerged when his brother and a friend, in separate conversations, suggested farming with water buffalo. When Littkemmann’s partner, Lori Smith, coincidentally mentioned reading a magazine article about this type of livestock, they decided to investigate

the idea thoroughly. The couple even made a trip to Italy, where they completed a two-week intensive course on farming with water buffalo. Ultimately, the couple established Ontario Water Buffalo Co.

Located north of Stirling, the company now has a staff of six, plus Littkemmann and Smith. Ontario Water Buffalo Co. has about 500 head of mostly Mediterranean water buffalo. It ships milk to Quality Cheese in Vaughan for processing into a variety of cheese products, and the buffalo meat is butchered and

packaged locally. Both the meats and cheeses are sold at the Buff Stuff store on the farm.

“We don’t want to be the biggest,” says Martin. “Our mission is to produce the best bred water buffalo using the best methods available.”

And the best methods seem to include nurturing an uncommon intimacy with their animals. If you mingle among the herd of buffalo at Ontario Water Buffalo Co., you’ll be greeted by what appears to be a mixture of curiosity and friendliness. **BF**



▲

Lori Smith with Yvette, the farm’s mascot. Littkemmann and Smith take Yvette to festivals and shows to demonstrate the friendliness of water buffalo. “People who believe you shouldn’t name your animals shouldn’t work with water buffalo,” says Smith.



▲ Jeffrey Smith feeding the young water buffalo. Jeffrey, Lori's son, recently returned to the farm to "help out." He has become both Littkemann and Lori's right-hand man.



▲ Darrien Moore beds down calves, some of which are just days old. Moore is training to be the calf manager.

Erin Joron cleans ▶ the udders of the water buffalo in advance of the twice daily milking. The new milking facility was installed in June 2015.



▲ Lori Smith milking water buffalo. Smith manages the milking and the Buff Stuff store, while her partner, Littkemann, manages the crops and maintains the equipment. They both share the management of the numerous and unpredictable day-to-day responsibilities.



◀ Caitlin West, herd manager, hoses down equipment in the milking parlour after morning milking.



▲ Erin Joron (left), Martin Littkemmann (middle), and Darrien Moore discuss a member of the herd that Joron and Moore feel is behaving in an unusual way and in need of attention.



▲ According to Littkemmann, customers showed up regularly at the family's back door, asking about buffalo meat and cheese products. It became obvious there was a solid business opportunity in opening a retail outlet. The Buff Stuff store opened in the summer of 2014 and is operated for regular weekly hours under the watchful eye of Vanessa Shorey. Here, Shorey shows some of the store's cheese products.

B'Elanna > in the yard at Ontario Water Buffalo Co., north of Stirling.



▲ Left to right, Erin Joron, Caitlin West, Lori Smith, Martin Littkemmann, Darrien Moore, Jeffrey Smith, Vanessa Shorey, and Derek Bauman with Alfalfa (the water buffalo). Alfalfa may be Yvette's understudy as the farm mascot because she insisted on being part of the group photograph.

Go ask ALUS

ALUS Canada has been growing quickly over the past 10 years, and it is now on the verge of further expansion. *Better Farming* takes a look at the organization at this critical juncture.

by NICHOLAS VAN ALLEN

M&R Orchards, just west of Tillsonburg in Elgin County, possesses all the hallmarks of a differentiated farm. The Michels who operate the farm's 100 acres sell apples from their orchard; they sell apple cider and vinegar, fruit baskets, gelato, honey and even honey fennel cough syrup from their roadside store.

But the farm varies in another way: the Michels are involved in a contract with ALUS Canada (Alternative Land Use Systems) which provides them extra income.

ALUS is a growing not-for-profit organization that rents farmland from farmers. The land is then retired and dedicated to environmental protection and conservation. On the Michels' farm, the ALUS projects include the instalment of a hedgerow along the farm's roadway, two pollinator strips for bees and the redevelopment of a historic wetland. The

projects occupy 7.5 acres, are integrated into the farm's operation and are positioned on marginal land.

ALUS has been steadily growing over the past 10 years as farmers like the Michels see the benefits of the extra funds that come from the ALUS relationship and become more conscious of the need for conservation.

Large producers have also taken advantage of ALUS deals. In Norfolk County, a 10,000-acre cash crop farm hosts ALUS projects. Farms small and large, then, have made agreements with ALUS, allowing the organization to expand.

ALUS gets the funding for such projects from several different sources. Some grants come from government agencies such as the Trillium Foundation. But ALUS's major sponsor has been the W. Garfield Weston Foundation, a charitable organization that "supports

innovative approaches that preserve and restore natural spaces," according to its website.

The grants have made ALUS into a substantive organization. ALUS works with 722 farmers and ranchers nationwide in 19 ALUS chapters. ALUS projects can be found in Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, P.E.I., Quebec and Saskatchewan.

ALUS is now set to develop further – into new communities and through new fundraising mechanisms.

Background: The ALUS-farmer relationship

The relationship between farmers and ALUS is straightforward. Farmers make a five-year contractual agreement with ALUS to retire marginal agricultural land. In turn, the farmers are paid an income for the land itself and for their efforts to maintain the projects.

The labour required for upkeep of the projects is minimal, says Alyssa Cousineau, program coordinator, ALUS Elgin County. For example, upkeep is often as easy "as mowing it once a year." The payments from ALUS to the producer consider the labour required to maintain the project as well as the land itself.

Before all that can happen, ALUS has to place a partnership advisory committee (PAC) in a specific community. Dave Reid, ALUS hub manager, Eastern Canada, notes that every ALUS community has a PAC. It's central to the organization's work in local communities.

An ALUS PAC comprises both producers and local leaders, says Reid, as well as "agency folk" such as OMAFRA and conservation authorities. In some ALUS communities, the latter groups have voting rights and in others they don't.

Often, a PAC is developed follow-



The Michel family of M&R Orchards has been working with ALUS on several projects. ALUS has established at M&R a hedgerow along the farm's roadside, a redeveloped historic wetland and two pollinator strips.



ALUS redeveloped a historic wetland, which had previously been filled in, at M&R Orchards. The wetland is now home to native flora and fauna.

ing a meeting of interested community members who need to show “ongoing commitment” to ALUS, says Reid.

One of the first ALUS projects grew out of just such a stewardship meeting, which took place in late 2001 in Norfolk County. By 2004, the Norfolk group had published a proposal for a pilot project, which spawned further expansion in the county. ALUS Canada is built on this Norfolk model.

What makes the projects successful, Reid says, is that they differ from any other conservation program. Farmers maintain their own land, “which they know best.”

Challenges

ALUS has faced some difficulties as it has expanded.

One such issue arises from the relationship between farmers, who own the land, and ALUS, a third-party group which requires access to it.

In March 2009, for example, Ontario Pork sent representatives to an ALUS Alliance meeting, and the Ontario Pork environmental committee later considered the ALUS program.

“Although the general principles of the program were encouraging, the

Committee had some reservations,” says a statement secured from Sam Bradshaw, Ontario Pork’s environmental communications specialist.

In particular, Ontario Pork was concerned about “third party involvement on producer land,” the statement reads.

Other farmers might have similar reservations when they consider making a deal with ALUS. An ALUS project, for example, allows ALUS program coordinators or farm

liaisons to visit a farmer’s land to monitor the projects. Usually the visits occur once a year, Reid notes, but other projects, like those at M&R Orchards, require more frequent inspections.

However, Dave Reid notes that farmers need not worry about working with ALUS. Farmers are not being regulated by ALUS, he says, since contracts are “voluntary, and farmers can quit at any time.”

If farmers back out early in the project, they would have to repay the start-up costs to ALUS, but such occasions are rare.

Additionally, since ALUS community groups start up the projects themselves, they have some control over the system itself.

Reasons for success

Despite encountering such speed bumps along the way, ALUS has expanded as farmers notice the benefits that the projects bring to their communities.

Farmers often find that after the instalment of an ALUS project on their land they develop a new sense of awareness of wildlife and the environment, Reid notes.

Even if they acquire just a one- or two-acre project, farmers will undergo a mindset change, and they will begin



M&R Orchards has two pollinator strips (occupying 1.5 acres total) developed by ALUS, on which native species can be found. This strip features Indian grass, brown-eyed Susans and big bluestem, among others.

to notice the environment around them in a new way. They may, for example, recognize a bird species that might not have been on their land before.

Farmers also find, Reid says, that the projects make their farms “more resilient to extreme climate changes.” So farmers not only get the incentive of income from ALUS, but also can get monetary benefits from environmental stability.

As more farmers experience positive results from the projects, ALUS spreads. According to Cousineau, ALUS Elgin has expanded. Word of mouth is one of the keys to the organization’s success.

Cousineau carefully notes that many ALUS communities limit the amount of a farmer’s land that ALUS takes on. ALUS Elgin, for example, has a “20 per cent rule of thumb.” ALUS in Elgin will not occupy any more than 20 per cent of a farm’s arable acreage. The rest, she comments, “stays in ag.”

ALUS does not desire to replace farms with conservation projects; instead, ALUS works with farmers to integrate conservation projects into their land and farm operations.

ALUS’s future goals

ALUS is now working to expand into new communities and to diversify its fundraising.

At the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, ALUS Canada and representatives from the W. Garfield Weston Foundation announced that ALUS will not only expand into Nova Scotia, but that the group will also begin rolling out a new funding mechanism which they call “The New Acre™ Project.”

According to a press release, The New Acre Project “will allow individuals and organizations to contribute to the ALUS program and obtain quantifiable environmental outcomes in return.”

ALUS’s goal: to empower “ordinary Canadians to make the difference

they want to see in the world.”

In other words, ALUS will encourage Canadians to sponsor ALUS projects. This fundraising mechanism will allow ALUS to continue growing as an organization.

ALUS hopes that by the end of 2017 the organization will expand from 18,000 acres dedicated to ALUS projects nationally, to 25,000 acres.

ALUS in your community?

Because ALUS seeks to expand, it is likely that farmers may consider taking on an ALUS project in the future.

Right now in Ontario, for example, ALUS is laying the groundwork for expansion into Peterborough and Chatham-Kent.

ALUS, though, only comes to a new community at the farmers’ request. If farmers would like to be involved with the organization, and if the organization’s goals are right for them, all they have to do is ask. **BF**



Alyssa Cousineau of ALUS Elgin County describes the compass plant. This native species now grows beside the redeveloped wetland. The plant is so named because its leaves always face north and south.



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The appeal of once-per-day milking

Milking just once every 24 hours cuts milk output per cow. But the strategy also slashes production costs and seems to produce longer-living, healthier cattle as well as more free time for milkers.

by NORMAN DUNN

Karl Meyer, a Bavarian farmer, became a TV star overnight when the local television channel discovered that he'd been running a successful milk production business for six years despite putting his 60 Simmental milkers through the milk stand only once per day.

He astounded farmers throughout southern Germany and Austria by telling the program Unser Land (Our Countryside) that business income actually remained the same as most twice-a-day milking enterprises, even though his cows only produced about half the national 9,000 litres lactation average. Meanwhile, the leisure time for Meyer and his family increased by two or three hours per working day.

True, Karl Meyer also changed from year-round calving to block calving for the whole herd in fall. This change also reduced his labour input. And he switched to organic milk production, a change that increased his income from 44 Canadian cents per litre to 70 cents per litre.

But he maintained his profit per cow mainly by stopping all feed purchases. His cows now get through the year more cheaply on a diet of homegrown grass, hay and silage. Meyer also reckons that his once-a-day (OAD) milking routine, coupled with lower feeding levels, contributes to better herd health. The productive lifetime for his cows looks like it will be longer, he says.

Producers seeking to cut labour on the dairy farm already have the alternative of robotic milking. But this demands substantial investment, and plenty of farmers want to maintain the hands-on approach. Are other dairy-herd owners attracted to Karl Meyer's OAD approach? Well, maybe not so many in Germany. But cross the English Channel to Britain and Ireland, and plenty of farmers practise the OAD milking routine.

Improving lifestyle was the main reason that Nathan Pryor, a dairyman in England's southwest, changed from twice-a-day (TAD) to OAD milking back in 2008 for his 340 head of Holsteins. Speaking at a British Grassland Society conference four



Bavarian TV Unser Land photo

Karl Meyer's Simmental cows receive no bought-in feed. They produce an average 4,500 litres on a low-input forage-only system with once-per-day milking. Meyer earns the equivalent of 70 cents per litre.

years after he started, Pryor recalled that he wanted to spend more time with his young family. So OAD was introduced, and the young farmer found he had hours of extra time every day. The time was indeed spent with the family but also on crucial management reviews, which nearly always paid dividends.

But there was more good news. The change to OAD improved cow body condition, health and fertility, Pryor reported. For instance, when he used the former TAD routine, an average 12 per cent of his cows were still empty 12 weeks after their first insemination post-calving. He told the Grassland conference that, after changing to the new milking regime, this figure had leveled out at six per cent of his cows still empty 11 weeks after their first insemination post-calving. Pryor block calves his herd and nowadays manages to calve 50 per cent within 14 days in spring – and 85 per cent within six weeks. This level of performance is achieved without any heifer synchronization!

Another bonus box ticked by this farmer is the attraction of OAD milking for young staff members. He says the afternoons are now free for milkers. For youngsters who regularly train at the gym to take part in sports, this lifestyle attraction is valuable; they had to forget about it in the past. Result: Pryor's milkers and cow managers stay longer in their jobs. Administration and herd management are therefore more consistent and efficient, he finds.

While improved breeding performances and cow health are useful advantages, the crucial point lies with the financial aspects – in other words, with the bottom line. Before Nathan Pryor changed to OAD milking, his herd averaged a modest 4,200 litres. He told the conference that the first year of single milking saw output per cow plummet to 2,900 litres (-31 per cent) and solids per cow decreased to 247 kilograms (-27 per cent).

Three years later, he reported that his yield had increased to 3,550 litres, and solids produced per cow were

Bavarian TV Unser Land photo



Meyer milks 60 Simmental cows in Bavaria. Changing over to once-a-day milking reduced his herd's milk output. But he was able to cut feed costs and enjoy a lot more leisure time each day.

only 10 per cent lower than the number of solids produced when milking occurred twice per day.

But Pryor points out that in a management system like his where grazing provides most feed for the cows, the production of milk solids per acre is the critical criterion. Cows have more time to make the most of the grass available when they are

being milked just once daily, he says.

In the Republic of Ireland, County Wexford, Michael Wall also operates a grass-based milk production system. He turned to his national farm advisory board – known as Teagasc – for advice after a family tragedy left him milking 90 spring-calvers almost always on his own.

“Consider reducing your daily

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workload by changing to once-a-day milking,” suggested the extension service. Ireland is a bit further ahead than the rest of Europe in this respect. Planeloads of dairy farmers regularly fly south to inspect OAD milking in New Zealand, where the strategy is much more popular. Irish government agricultural research has also dedicated time and money to testing the system.

The globally respected Moorepark Animal & Grassland Research Institute, for instance, recently finished a two-year trial with Holsteins on OAD milking. Results from this Irish research centre showed milk solids were down by 17 per cent per cow. Milk produced was 24 per cent below the average for conventionally milked cows. Interestingly, the final individual lactation yield levelled out at 4,400 litres, just about the same as that of Karl Meyer’s Simmental cows in Bavaria.

But the Moorepark results also

confirmed the many advantages of the system: greatly reduced labour input, less concentrate feed and notable improvements in cow health and fertility.

All this research work meant 62-year-old Michael Wall had plenty of scientific advice when he decided to push the milk pump button just once-a-day for the rest of his milking career. After a bad first year when production per cow plummeted by 30 per cent and 25 per cent of the herd was sold off because the cows just didn’t take to the system, the Wall cows returned to their former average output in year two of OAD milking.

Wall’s daughter and son-in-law have now taken over the herd. Both have jobs outside the farm. Milking starts at 6 a.m. and is finished for the day at 8.30 a.m. For this young professional couple with children, the OAD strategy has allowed them to stay in dairy farming while meeting all their other career and family

commitments and plans.

How well OAD milking works with confined systems, where cows are on silage and grains year-round, has not yet been thoroughly tested. At least not here in Europe.

But for grass-based systems involving summer milk production from grazing cows, the strategy attracts an increasing band of followers in Britain and Ireland, and some producers in continental Europe have also started to adopt the practice. Recordings so far indicate that the best-managed systems return the same income per grazed acre as the conventional TAD approach.

Naturally, everyone in the milk business seeks profitability first. But a close second goal for all the farmers mentioned here is more time away from the daily milking chore. A bonus of many hours, some for crucial management input, but most for all-important free time with family and friends. **BF**

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Simmentals on a German dairy farm. The old breed lags behind the Holstein in milk production, but its enthusiasts claim the Simmental offers better health and a longer productive lifetime.

The reinvention of a tobacco farm

The Buehners grew their last tobacco crop in 2008. By then, the resourceful couple had found two new crops to grow and began their transition.

by MARY BAXTER

Disappointing barely begins to describe the 2008 tobacco crop on the rolling hills of

Anita and Steve Buehner's 180-acre farm near Waterford in Norfolk County. The crop was tiny, its quality

poor. "When that crop was done, I was done," Steve Buehner says, as he and Anita recall the now long-ago season during an interview that takes place on the patio outside the farm's former barn.

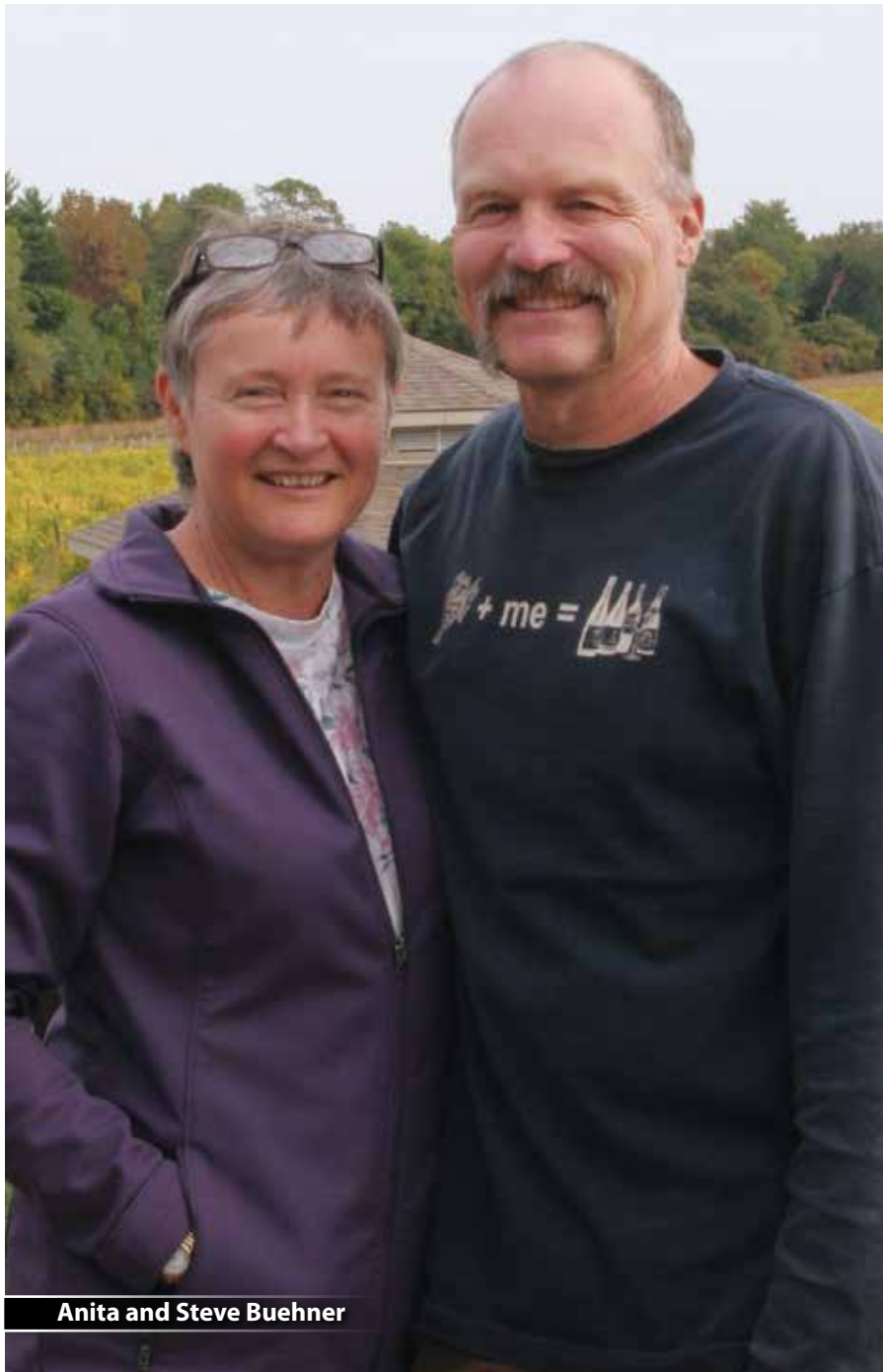
Ever since they bought the farm from Anita's parents in 1990 the Buehners had grown tobacco; the farm had been in tobacco for decades before that, and the crop had been a steady presence in both Anita's and Steve's lives growing up.

But public attitudes and government policies were changing. By 2008, Anita was already working off-farm for the first time in her life, employed at a Simcoe auto parts plant. There was nothing the couple wanted more than to work with each other again on the farm. To do so, "we had to reinvent ourselves," says Steve.

Years earlier, they'd planted lavender as a trial and wondered if establishing large-scale production of the crop was the answer. Attendance at a Washington State conference during the fall of 2008 revealed another possibility: value-added niche agritourism. "That made much more sense to us," Anita says.

They decided to grow cold-hardy wine grapes too, having also recently joined a local group intent on establishing grape and wine production in the region.

Anita returned to the farm full-time in 2009, and the next year the couple worked feverishly to install the trellises for the first eight acres of grape vines. Under the ALUS (Alternative Land Use Services) program they introduced a wetland in the lowest spot on the farm to accompany the long corridors of prairie grasses they had added on either side



Anita and Steve Buehner

of their fields the year before.

“We will never be this busy again,” Anita declared one night after Steve returned from a chilly dip in the irrigation pond.

Now, she smiles. “My goodness, what was I thinking?”

Since then, the Buehners have transformed their equipment barn into an on-farm store, demolished their glass greenhouse to create room for parking and septic beds, created lavender products and added wine and hard cider production and sales to their operation. (They also grow apples and cash crops.)

This year marked the third season of their Bonnieheath Estate Lavender & Winery. Profit is still elusive but revenue steadily grows. The Buehners are optimistic; they knew it would take years before the business would turn a profit, Anita says.

Both Steve and Anita say that success is being able to look back and know they’ve enjoyed what they’re



Steve Buehner draws a sample from wine aging in a steel vessel.

doing. “And certainly at this point, I can say that whether it was in tobacco (or the new venture), I really enjoyed doing what we were doing, the transition that we’ve gone through and where we’re at now,” says Anita.

“Every step along the way was interesting and challenging and rewarding.”

What’s your role on your farm operation?

STEVE: The grunt (laughter). I leave all the paperwork and all the, I could be sarcastic and say the “fun stuff,” to Anita. She does all the business parts.

ANITA: So Steve does more of the agricultural and management of the farming side of things. He is the winemaker’s assistant as well.

And whereas I used to share in the responsibilities of the agricultural portion because that’s where my heart is, I’ve had to give that up. So a lot of that has been turned over to Steve. Then of course there’s more managing of the employees, training and payroll as well as the tracking of inventory, developing lavender products and participating in a lot of meetings.

How many people does your farm employ?

ANITA: Three farm workers; we had three that were seasonal for the retail. We have our winemaker as well.

STEVE: The two of us and don’t forget about your dad – 89 years old.

ANITA: He still looks after all the lawn maintenance on the entire farm. My niece helps out in the summer.

Hours you work per day?

ANITA: Minimum 10.

STEVE: I try not to work on Sunday. I have a lot of physical work to do all week.

Email or text?

STEVE: We text to our (four) kids because they’re all over the place. But I would say we’d email more.

Any favourite apps?

STEVE: I would think (Excel is my favourite), definitely.

ANITA: I do a lot in Word as well.

STEVE: I despise Word. There’s too many things in Word that something (happens) and –

ANITA: It’s because you don’t use it often enough.

STEVE: I know. I don’t have that with Excel.

How often do you travel?

ANITA: We hadn’t (travelled) in years.

STEVE: We were here working a long time, a lot of hours, and our two sons, we encouraged them to go to Australia, (on) working holiday visas. When they were there, Anita and I decided (to go).

It was a nice trip we had. We went to Australia, Tasmania, New Zealand, beautiful.

ANITA: We visited six different lavender farms in New Zealand and Australia, and six different wine regions. Then we came home and said

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(to each other) you know, what a shame that we've never been to our own East Coast. I said, we need to do this in August. Steve says impossible. I said no, we have to make this work. We were there for a week.

STEVE: Cape Breton and the whole works.

For us it's a trip but it's always more than a trip. We're always looking at the agriculture part of it, environmental part of it, and we're looking at the agritourism part of it. We're looking at how people run their businesses.

Number of hours in the office each day?

STEVE: An hour for me. How many hours would you spend at the computer, Anita, six?

ANITA: At least.

What do you like best about farming?

ANITA: I love the production. If I could spend more time out doing production again, that would be a great next step for me.

STEVE: Being outside, being in production, growing things. Not doing the same thing every day.

What do you like least?

ANITA: The lack of freedom for time. Everything is scheduled. Can you fit it in; can you fit that in?

STEVE: Anita and I are the type of couple that we can work together all day and still look at each other at night. So that part of it I miss. I mean, we used to work together on the farm (when we grew tobacco).

ANITA: That's what (we miss), that we have time to work together.

STEVE: The frustrating thing to me I guess right now (too) is the bookwork Anita has to do. She's really tied down to it.

ANITA: For example, the tobacco seedling production, that was my baby. I'd clip the plants. I'd water the plants. When Steve started propagating lavender plants, that's my job. And it's really, really tough for me to let go of something and let him take that over. I didn't have the time to do that anymore. So I had to give up on a lot of those things.

What is the single most important piece of advice you've received?

ANITA: Farming must create profit, not create work. We're not doing things just to keep ourselves busy. This is a business.

What's your management philosophy?

ANITA: We like to farm using good agricultural practices. Our winemaking philosophy is to grow grapes that we can successfully grow on a farm that we live on, not trying to do what someone else is doing. (We want to) successfully grow grapes and then ask our winemaker to make the best wine that he can from it. It's the reason why we've selected the varieties that we did. Not because we think they're superior cultivars but we believe them to be superior cultivars for our farm.

Are you currently involved in any committees, boards, associations, or volunteer efforts?

ANITA: Director, Ontario South Coast Wineries & Growers Association; director, Norfolk Fruit Growers' Association; member, Norfolk Agricultural Advisory Board.

What are your hobbies or recreational activities?

ANITA: I love to read a book – that is my relaxation. Steve's not a reader but his relaxation is sporting.

What does your family think of farming?

ANITA: Our parents, our families, they take a look at what we've done in our transition and they're happy that we've found something that we love to do to continue in farming.

STEVE: The kids are quite interested in what we're doing.

ANITA: We've always told them to do what you love to do. As far as them continuing in agriculture, I still find that they're relatively young.

They have to find their passions and follow their passions.

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Anita Buehner

What's your most important goal?

STEVE: To enjoy what you're doing. It makes everything so much easier. The long hours and everything else.

ANITA: I was going to say something very similar.

How do you define success?

ANITA: To look back and say, that was an awesome life. And you know, that Steve and I have been able to do that together. To look back and go, wow, wasn't that a ride the two of us have been on?

STEVE: Absolutely. And a lot of good people we've been around, that's for sure.

Is your farm vehicle messy or neat?

ANITA: I would say it's dirty.

STEVE: It does get cleaned out at the end of the season though.

ANITA: But you know, that's once a year. Is it neat? Yes. Things need to be in their place, and Steve and I are both like that.

What are three items in your farm vehicle?

ANITA/STEVE: GPS, first aid kit, and Sudoku puzzle book.

What was the last piece of equipment you bought for your farm?

STEVE/ANITA: Our lavender harvester.

STEVE: Originally from New Zealand.

What's the best time of day?

STEVE: About 10 p.m.

ANITA: So your best time of day is that late?

STEVE: Yeah, 9 or 10 p.m. It's quiet. You're normally sitting beside me.

ANITA: I was going to say 9, 10 p.m. I'm chilling as well.

STEVE: Sleeping beside me.

What was your most memorable crop/production year?

ANITA: 2010.

STEVE: That's what I was just thinking.

ANITA: It was the year we planted the vineyard, we planted the lavender. **BF**

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Will 2017 be the year you start commodity marketing your grain?

Don't be intimidated – becoming familiar with the markets may not be as overwhelming as you think.

by DENISE FAGUY

December is a good time to plan. For years, you have considered the advantages of commodity crop marketing. You're interested, but then you start to research and your eyes start to glaze over when you encounter terms like futures, margin, hedge, bull markets, and bear markets. Don't let those specialized terms intimidate you.

In the end, commodity marketing is about understanding supply and demand. When there is lots of supply, commodity prices are typically low. When there is no supply, commodity prices are typically high. Traditionally, supply is higher at harvest and so the price goes down.

But the psychology of fear has a large part to play as well. If there is a drought or flood during the spring or summer, people in the industry may begin to worry that there will not be enough of the commodity when harvest comes. So, organizations such as grain elevators, food suppliers, and energy suppliers enter into agree-

ments with farmers ahead of time to guarantee their supply at harvest.

The majority of farmers sell their crops at harvest. That's how crops have been marketed for hundreds of years. But, most years, harvest time is when the price is at its lowest.

For most farmers, commodity marketing is a major change in habits. There are, of course, risks involved with pre-selling your corn or soybeans. For example, what if the price of grain is actually higher at harvest than when you book? Will this mean you will lose money? Historically this has happened – but the law of averages is on your side.

What if you pre-sell and at harvest you don't have enough bushels to meet your contracts? There are ways to reduce this risk as well. As outlined below, if you don't commit 100 per cent of your crop you should be able to mitigate this risk. What is the worst crop you ever had? For peace of mind, don't commit more than that amount of bushels in a forward or

futures contract.

First, you need to gain at least a basic understanding of commodity marketing. The price of corn and soybeans is influenced by many factors: weather and politics – both in our own province and country as well as internationally (United States, Brazil, Russia, etc.), energy costs, and the Canadian dollar, to name just a few.

The easiest way to start to build an understanding of these factors is to consume specialized information. You can select from a number of newsletters and services to subscribe to. And these resources are usually worth their subscription fee since they save you time in researching the information. Consider the investment this way: is it worth the \$500 subscription fee if your bottom line is increased by \$10,000 each year?

Before you move onto the next step, you should determine your cost of production. There are many tools available from commodity risk

Historical patterns of corn prices



Glossary of common commodity marketing terms

Basis: the difference between the cash price of a commodity and the price of the nearest futures contract (the contract which is next to expire).

Cash – futures = basis.

Bear market or bearish: a market where prices are trending downward.

Bull market or bullish: a market where prices are trending upward.

Forward Contract: agreement to deliver a certain amount of commodity at a certain date for an

agreed-upon price; each contract is unique and specific to both sides involved.

Futures (Contract): a contract or contracts covering the sale of a commodity at a future date and agreed-upon price. A futures contract usually outlines the quality and quantity of the crop, as well as the delivery time and place.

Futures contracts are similar to forward contracts, except the former are more standardized – with the same date and quantity for everyone.

Hedge: using different financial transactions to reduce (hedge) a farmer's risk. A hedge may be the use of a forward contract, futures contract, etc.

Margin: cash posted by a farmer as a guarantee of fulfillment of a futures contract. (It is not a down payment.)

If this article has helped you begin to conquer your fears and you want to take the next step, visit www.farms.com/market-school to watch educational videos on commodity marketing. **BF**

advisers, government ministries, etc., to help you to determine your cost of production. You need to understand your costs before you determine the price at which you'll sell your crops.

Commodity marketing involves great discipline. Based on the trends and analysis you review for the crop year, decide at what price you will pre-sell. This decision should be made in January. Then, when the crop reaches that price later in the growing season, enter into an agreement – even if the trend shows the price may continue to rise.

“A number of people play the ‘what if’ game,” says Maurizio “Moe” Agostino, chief commodity strategist with Farms.com Risk Management. “They wait because they cannot commit to a price in case it keeps on going up, but then when the price falls it's too late and they can't pre-sell at a great price. Marketing is more of an art than a science, but if you are disciplined and stick to your pre-defined plan, you will likely succeed.”

The best strategy may be to get into commodity marketing slowly, and to be disciplined about it. In the first year, perhaps experiment by only pre-selling 25 per cent of your crop. The following year, if all goes well and you are more confident, try 50 per

cent. Depending on your ability to handle stress, perhaps you never pre-sell more than 50 per cent – and that's okay. If you make five per cent

more on 50 per cent of your harvest, it is likely worth your efforts.

Make 2017 the year to conquer your marketing fears! **BF**



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Selecting next year's corn hybrids

Seed companies offer a variety of incentives to farmers who place their orders before the end of the year. Consider trial data and your relationship with your dealer when ordering your seed.

by DALE COWAN

The end of the year is a busy time for just about everyone in agriculture – including the person trying to secure a seed order from you.

During these months, seed companies want to review the total number of orders for each hybrid. The companies then match that information up with their own seed production and availability listings.

While each farmer may only order a few bags or a few hundred bags of seed, the seed companies need to plan logistics for millions of bags of seed. And these bags need to be sorted by seed size and treatments for each region in which the company operates. It is not unusual for each hybrid

to have 12-digit stock keeping units (SKUs) based on seed sizes and treatment combinations.

The logistics for servicing thousands of customers is a challenging one. For this reason the companies cannot wait until spring for a farmer to make a purchasing decision. To encourage customers to place their orders in December, seed companies offer all sorts of marketing incentives. Such offerings include early order discounts, volume discounts that decline with each passing month, and prepay discounts. Typically, the latter discounts are greater than the cost of borrowed money. Some companies even offer free financing until spring.

You have to ask yourself: are the

incentives reason enough to order seed from a particular seed company? The answer should be no. These incentives are merely factors influencing the bigger purchasing decision, but they impact money management and can optimize work capital. Indeed, some discounts for high volumes, early order, and prepay can be as high as 10 to 15 per cent. On a \$300 bag of hybrid corn seed, these discounts can translate into a savings of \$30.00 to \$45.00 per bag. Or, at 32,000 seeds per acre, this equates to cost savings of \$12.00 to \$18.00 an acre on seed.

I have been around the industry long enough to have participated in many surveys concerning what drives



Kent Wolfe, AGRIS Cooperative photo

In on-farm trials, farmers can compare their current selections with new hybrids – and see how the results stack up.

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seed purchasing decisions. In order of importance for seed corn purchasing factors are consistency of performance, standability, rapid dry down at harvest, and yield results. (Within the survey results, trait selections for above- and below-ground insect pests and seed treatments were inferred as part of consistent performance.)

As a matter of fact, the one thing that farmers will not tolerate is wet corn at harvest; they can forgive most other things. You do not want to be the seed representative who sold the hybrid that is still at 30 per cent moisture at harvest time!

The decisions regarding hybrid selection are more complicated due to performance parity amongst the various seed corn company selections. Long gone are the days where a single seed company dominated the marketplace with far superior performance. In a typical performance plot of similar maturities, oftentimes the top three competing hybrids will have

very similar results.

To help sort out the performance differences, farmers can access a number of useful sources of information: the Ontario Corn Committee trials, seed company performance plots, ag retailer plots and side-by-side trials on their own farms. The life cycle of most hybrids on the market is barely three years, which means constant variety turnover. Thus, it may be difficult to get enough information on consistency from a single source.

The Ontario Corn Committee trials at gocorn.net offer numerous interactive tools to sort hybrids by maturity range, trial locations and number of years the specific hybrid was grown in that location. Farmers can compare such things as yield index, standability, harvest moisture and test weight. You can also use the seed cost calculator, and see how well a particular hybrid has performed over various locations and years.



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In order of importance for seed corn purchasing factors are consistency of performance, standability, rapid dry down at harvest, and yield results.

However, the data from the most recent season may not yet be available for review at the time of ordering for

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the next year.

Seed corn company plots often have multiple locations with various maturity ranges. These plots will feature comparable competing hybrids against the company's own top-of-the-line hybrids. 2016 trials most likely featured different seed treatments of fungicide only, compared to both Class 12 and non-Class 12 insecticides. Most of these performance plots will also showcase new hybrids available for the 2017 growing season.

Corn companies do a tremendous amount of screening in their selection trials and will always bring their very best to the marketplace. In their own plot work, seed companies are looking for consistency and the same things farmers want. The stakes are too high for companies not to bring their best to market.

When reviewing company plot results, look to see how they are presenting their data – especially against competing companies. Are the companies only showing the winning plots, mismatching maturities to gain an upper hand? (Longer-day maturities tend to have higher yields.) Or do they publish all results – win, lose or draw? The main advantage to company plots is that the results are available almost immediately after harvest. The results are also made available on respective company websites and in various social media forums.

Local, full-service ag retailer and seed dealer plots are another source of information. These plots are located on customers' farms.

These plots are often placed on a representative cross section of soil types and growing conditions. They are very local and farmers readily identify with the performance of such plots because they may well represent how the hybrids might perform on their own farms. Many of these plots will showcase nearly all locally-available hybrids. It is not unusual for these plots to showcase 15 to 30 or more different, competing hybrids.

Ag retailer and seed dealer plots



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Most farmers will compare their current selections to a new offering on a side-by-side, full-scale trial.

are not, however, without some limitations. Rarely is there a check hybrid repeated that can be used to help understand soil variability across the plot. Some plots are so big they are actually inadvertently grown in slightly different soil types in the same field, which can skew the results. Comparing results from one end of plot to another may not be the fairest way to conduct an evaluation.

The final source of information is the farmers' own plot. Most farmers will compare their current selections to a new offering on a side-by-side, full-scale trial. These selections will be replicated two or more times across the field. This real-world comparison takes into account field variability, fertility and a host of other management factors.

Once again, an on-farm trial is not without its limits. It is very important that these comparisons run perpendicular to tile lines for a fair comparison. Also, ensure the entire field has the same fertility and weed control programs. You only want to compare the hybrids – not a starter fertilizer trial on one side of the field and nitrogen trial on the other side. Nor a manure trial, where one half of the field received a fall application and the other received a spring applica-

tion. These differing treatments can affect hybrid performance and may lead to inappropriate evaluations.

Regardless of who plants and manages the plots, farmers can attend field days and plot tours with barbecues throughout the season. You can discuss hybrids with seed representatives at these events, too. There is no shortage of opportunities to attend show-and-tell presentations, and acquire technical information on the current offerings. All you need to do is invest some time, show up and ask questions!

The final factor in hybrid selection is: who do you deal with? Who do you trust to get factual information with a professional interpretation tailored to your unique needs? Ask yourself a few questions. Who knows you best? Who solves your problems quickly and effectively? Who brings you new and innovative ideas and products? Chances are it might be a local Certified Crop Adviser that sees you most often.

I will leave Class 12 discussions for another time! **BF**

Dale Cowan, CCA-ON, 4 R NMS, is a senior agronomist with AGRIS Co-operative Ltd. and Wanstead Farmers Co-operative Ltd.

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JUNIOR FARMER PRIDE ON DISPLAY

The Junior Farmers' Association of Ontario (JFAO) is excited to announce its new gate sign initiative that allows alumni and current members to proudly display "Alumni Lives Here," "Member Lives Here" and custom gate signs on their property.

The initiative was formally launched in September at the International Plowing Match and Rural Expo held in Wellington County. A limited number of signs were made available for the launch but after an overwhelming response from the public, the JFAO has made it possible to order the signs through their website at: <http://www.jfao.on.ca/resources/gate-signs>.

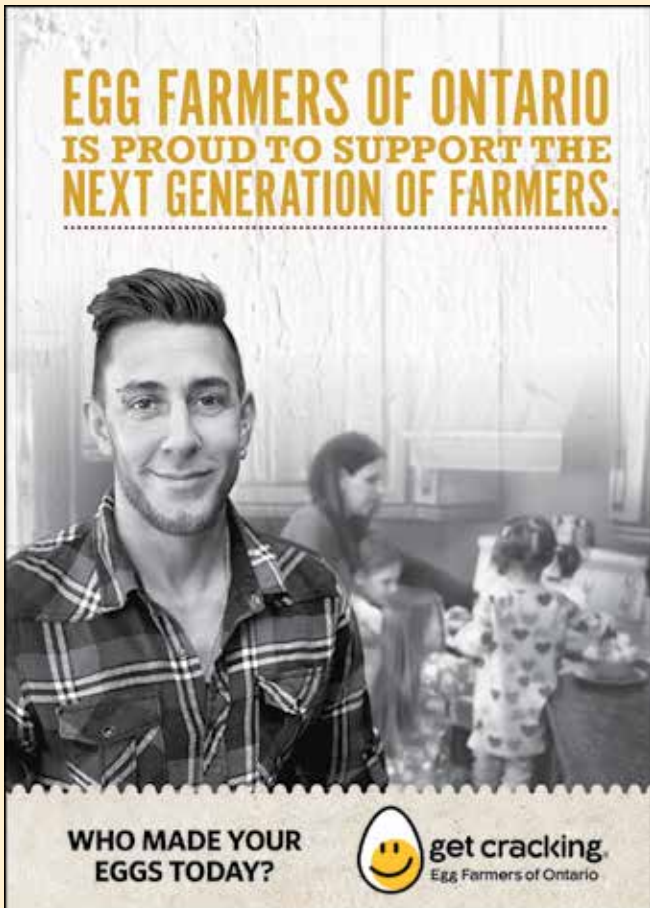
Content was prepared by Amanda Brodhagen, Executive Director of Marketing in partnership with Better Farming (JFAO Sponsor).

CENTURY FARM SIGNS CONTINUE

The rural Ontario landscape is dotted with many farms that have been in the same family for 100 consecutive years or more. The Junior Farmers' Association of Ontario (JFAO) is proud to offer a program called the Century Farm Sign (CFS) that allows farm families to display a CFS on their property. The CFS program began in 1967 as a Canadian Centennial project of the JFAO and proudly continues today.

CFS are available for \$75 (price is subject to change without notice) and certain requirements must be met in order to be eligible. Additional details and application forms are available through the JFAO website at: <http://www.jfao.on.ca/resources/programs>.

The JFAO also offers 125, 150, 175 and 200 year add-on signs to recognize family farms that have reached milestones beyond 100 years. Add-on signs may be purchased for \$40 each.



Families wishing to replace their sign due to weather damage can email agprograms@jfao.on.ca. Replacement signs are available for \$75.

The JFAO encourages families with gate signs to show their pride by submitting photos to marketing@jfao.on.ca. Submissions may be used for promotional purposes.



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Stop spreading weeds

You need to be proactive to reduce the spread of resistant weeds. Here are some tips.

by PATRICK LYNCH



This year was another classic one in which weeds got too big to be easily controlled.

A recent email got me thinking. It started, “Pat, can you offer us some help on how we can control/kill this weed? This is mostly a problem with our livestock customers. Some are growing corn in their rotation and some are not. The roadside ditches and waste areas are full of this so we know how this weed is spreading into most fields. It is really taking over many fields, both in direct-seeded forages as well as cereal under-seeded with alfalfa-grass mixtures.” The email sender was referring to wild carrot, sometimes called Queen Anne’s lace – and sometimes called other things.

This email made me think of two things.

1) Weeds spreading to a farm from off the farm.

2) Dealing with resistant weeds. Wild carrot was the first-known resistant weed in Ontario. In the late 1950s, wild carrot developed resistance to 2,4-D because the townships sprayed yearly with this herbicide.

Weed resistance is a lot worse than most growers believe. If more Ontario growers knew how bad this issue is, I believe they would take weed control more seriously.

Here are some facts. There are farms in the United States where the land cannot be rented because of weed resistance. These weeds did not just “appear;” they were spread. Some growers are now hand pulling weeds, which can be costly. There are also

counties in the United States where weed control is strictly enforced. You are not allowed to let certain weeds go to seed.

In Ontario, maybe we need to do this on a township basis. Have growers voluntarily agree to control weeds, and encourage their neighbours to do so as well. In Europe, farmers may lose the use of glyphosate for the 2018 growing season. But many producers there are not upset since glyphosate has lost its purpose on many farms. Rather, they are promoting crop rotations, fallow and tillage to control weeds.

If you seriously want to delay the development and spread of weeds to your farms there are a number of simple steps you can take.

Stop the spread of weeds from

roadsides and fence rows. Ask your township what the local regulations are – but we have to try to control the spread of weeds from public land. Some growers level the roadsides and clip them. This helps to give access to fields at many points and keeps weeds under control.

Some of you are planning on using the new Roundup Ready 2 Xtend soybeans to control weeds, but you cannot rely solely on the new Roundup XtendiMax herbicide to solve your weed resistance problems. You must use multiple modes of action of herbicides when you spray glyphosate-resistant weeds. Otherwise you will quickly develop weeds that are resistant to multiple herbicides.

The next step is to get serious about selecting your herbicides – and record them. You should keep a record of what was sprayed each year and try to use a different herbicide group in the following year. If you never plant the same crop twice in a row it is easier to rotate herbicides.

One of the reps I work with in the crop protection industry says, “Using a different mode of action from year to year is not enough. That’s an old recommendation and it won’t work any longer. I am a firm believer that using multimodes of action acting on the same species needs to become an annual practice.

“And going forward immediately, multi will need to mean more than



Some growers level the roadsides and clip the weeds.

two modes of action. Recall the conversation we had about Roundup Ready 2 Xtend soybeans and only using glyphosate/dicamba as a herbicide tool. Applying only glyphosate/dicamba will really only mean using dicamba (single mode of action) on weeds that are already glyphosate resistant and increasingly Group 2 resistant also. Adding dicamba (Group 4) to the list of resistant herbicide modes of action in Ontario will be the beginning of the end. We are not finding new herbicide modes of action and haven't for almost 20 years. Farmers need to wake up or be prepared for full scale mechanical and/or hand weeding."

Another step is to scout fields early. This year was another classic year where weeds got too big to be easily controlled. Small weeds are easier to kill than large weeds. I am not sure why so many fields were

sprayed too late this year. It may be a result of a dependence on custom sprayers. More growers need to have their own sprayers even if they also use custom sprayers. This way, growers can spray some of their own acres if they cannot wait for the custom sprayer.

As soon as you go seven days without rain, the weeds will grow through. Growers/applicators keep waiting for residual products to be activated. Meanwhile, weeds like lamb's quarters, ragweed, velvetleaf, etc. get measured in inches instead of leaf numbers.

Most post-emergent herbicide label instructions are based on leaf number, not size. Read the product labels. It seems increasingly common that too many products are applied late. Add in drought-like conditions and it's a recipe for disaster.

Another tip is to spray weeds in

the fall. This year there was a great opportunity to spray fleabane in winter wheat fields. A small number of growers took advantage of this opportunity. More could have. Most should have.

In many cases, post-emergent weed control was sacrificed because of water volume. You can use low volumes of water with some herbicides but many post-emergence herbicides other than glyphosate work better with higher water volumes.

The new dicamba (XtendiMax herbicide) for spraying dicamba-resistant soybeans needs high water volumes. Comment from same friend who works in the crop protection industry: "I continue to hear from many growers that 'I have a 50-acre sprayer' or 'I have a 100-acre sprayer,' for example. Regardless of the product or combination of products, they use the same water volume with the same nozzles with the same settings from field to field, crop to crop, year to year. This is archaic thinking."

Finally, we need to know the locations of the resistant weeds. As we get into the amaranths and the next generation of resistant weeds, we have to be able to track them. In this matter, common good has to supersede an individual's right to privacy. **BF**

Consulting agronomist Patrick Lynch, CCA-ON, formerly worked with OMAFRA and Cargill.



"I continue to hear from many growers that 'I have a 50-acre sprayer' or 'I have a 100-acre sprayer,' for example."

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Technical expertise and specialized knowledge on every farm team

Skilled labour and communication are necessary for an operation's success.

by RALPH WINFIELD

Some of us are old enough to remember the threshing machine coming up the farm laneway. In those days it was a true community effort to get the grain into the granary and the straw into the straw mow. Both of those commodities were used primarily on the farm to feed and bed livestock.

When threshing machines were replaced with small, often pull-type combines, they provided farm independence. At one time the major Canadian combine manufacturer was Massey Ferguson. This company had a vision to have its little self-propelled combine (the model 35) on every 100-acre farm.

That philosophy did not work out because we had, and still have, both good livestock managers and good machinery owner/operators – so the idea of a combine on every farm was not practical. Farmers focused on cash cropping bought larger combines and did custom work.

My third combine fell into that category in the early 1990s. I combined for two local dairy farmers who had no desire to own or maintain their own combines. Their financial support allowed me to recover my capital investment sooner than I had planned. That good used combine with both headers – one of which was new – cost me less than \$100,000.

Times have changed significantly in the last 25 years. Today \$100,000 would not even buy a new 35- or 40- foot draper header. However, the combine operator must still have those seat-of-the-pants skills which only come from experience. For example, if a stalk chopper loses a blade/hammer, you will only know by the vibration of the seat that the combine must be stopped immediately to prevent extensive



As combines get bigger, so do their headers and their capability to harvest more acres per day.

damage!

Many cash croppers who now offer custom combining services have at least one large combine, plus all the additional equipment that is necessary to keep that big combine operating. The additional equipment often includes two grain buggies to ensure that the combine does not have to stop and unload, greatly increasing the daily acreage covered.

Grain movement

With even one grain buggy, the harvest team must include at least three people so grain can be moved efficiently from the field to the local elevator or to on-farm drying/storage facilities.

Hopper-bottom grain trailers and/or big hopper wagons are often used to replace the little hopper wagons or dump trucks that were used with the smaller combines.

Skilled labour/help becomes a necessity – and is often difficult to find. Farm-trained operators either become part of an extended family farm unit or move on to off-farm employment after graduation.

The farm work team

As farms move from one generation to the next, multiple owners can prove beneficial if there is a good understanding of the team effort. But as has always been the case, newcomers – especially husbands or wives of adult children – must find their niche if they wish to be part of the team. That is not always easy, especially if the newcomer tries to take over a coveted position such as bookkeeper or combine operator – a position that may have been held for many years by a senior member of the team.

Communication is critical and regular team meetings must be held to establish work priorities, as well as long-term priorities for capital purchases such as more land, more livestock or equipment upgrades.

Many of us have seen family teams break down, especially when the subject of inheritance becomes an issue as the older generation wishes to retire or reduce its active involvement in day-to-day operations.

To expand or change direction

In Ontario, the opportunity to

expand acreage of family farm units has become increasingly difficult because of land prices. Low interest rates and urban expansion pressure have inflated land prices significantly. You should have recently received your MPAC Property Assessment Notices, used for taxation from 2017 to 2020.

Many younger farmers enter into share-cropping agreements with retiring farmers who wish to maintain their rural lifestyle. In addition, many farms are being purchased by investors/speculators. However, these farms also provide at least temporary expansion potential for younger farmers to rent or share crop.

The realities

Farm machinery, tractors, planters and combines will continue to increase in size and will have to cover more acreage in order to reduce the unit cost per acre – a very important criteria that must be considered before new or nearly new equipment is purchased or leased.

At the same time, farm equipment operator expertise requirements can and will continue to increase significantly. Young, potential equipment operators are tending to leave the farm to test the waters in higher paying off-farm employment. Most of them want full-time employment, especially if they are planning to start a family.



Note the long unloading augers on these combines to reach out past the wide header to unload into the grain buggies.

I speak from experience. I left the home farm to go to college/university and break away.

I also taught many young farm students in the two-year agricultural diploma programs at Ridgetown and Woodstock for a total of 12 years. Whenever there were private discussions of going back to the farm directly after



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Today's large grain buggies must have tracks or walking beam axles with large tires to minimize soil compaction which is especially important as we move to minimum or no-till practices.

graduation, or going away to work at some other job, I always recommended the latter option for at least a two- or three-year period.

Why? Because I still believe that it is important to work for non-family, at least temporarily, before setting long-term career goals.

Conclusions

Personally, I thoroughly enjoyed my 15 years at college/university and working at other agricultural endeavors, including Ontario Hydro, before returning to my wife's family farm. When we returned to the farm, I came on my terms: we bought the

farm and, therefore, retained our independence – and the potential gain from inflation. This timing worked out very well, as we arrived with some cash in the bank to complete home renovations and buy (primarily used) farm machinery.

Unfortunately, the Ontario government has closed down many of the two-year agricultural diploma programs in the province. Only the Ridgetown and Alfred Colleges remain – both under the University of Guelph. These shorter term, two-year agricultural programs gave many young farm people the opportunity to expand their horizons and meet new friends with shared aspirations.

Probably 50 per cent of the two-year diploma students I taught left the farm and did not return. They are, however, gainfully employed, mostly in agriculturally-oriented businesses. **BF**

Ralph Winfield is a retired professional engineer, farmer and technical writer.

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Determining winter maintenance plans

Use the winter months to complete oil changes and decide which repairs should be undertaken to prepare your equipment for the coming season.

by JAAP KROONDIJK



Grab the grease gun and start systematically and intentionally going around the machine.

According to Wikipedia, “technical maintenance is intended to maintain or improve the health of some asset. It forms an integral part of any asset health management strategy.”

Your equipment is part of your farm business assets, so put the statement above into practice and maintain your equipment. Maintenance is a management decision.

Consider: what do I expect from that piece of equipment next season and how many more seasons do I need to use it? With those questions in mind, you need to give your equipment an honest going over before putting it away for the winter. Believe me – all the issues it has today will still be there next spring. And the problems will likely get worse if you don't address them sooner rather than later!

Keep a notepad, iPad, you-name-it

pad handy and start by making notes about what is not working properly when you use your equipment. You or your operator know best what issues have slowly developed. And, if you do not complete your own maintenance and repairs, then share that information with your technicians. Having this information saves them a lot of time and helps to prevent them from overlooking the item that annoys you the most.

The owner's manual for most pieces of equipment typically has a maintenance schedule which states the recommended oil and filter interval changes. The schedule also outlines other factory-recommended maintenance items. These recommendations are based on regular use of the equipment, which is not the case with a lot of seasonal machinery.

For example, if you put 200 hours a year on a piece of machinery and

the engine oil interval is 500 hours, then do not wait two and a half years before changing the engine oil! Yes, technically, this is what the maintenance schedule directs, but that is not a wise move.

Oil breaks down and, in the case of engine oil, it should be changed at least once a year. If you run 1,000 hours per year, then an oil change twice per year would be acceptable. The same rule applies for hydraulic/transmission oil – do not wait longer than two years to complete this type of oil change or you will be in trouble.

Use sound judgement when making your oil change decisions. Consider: what do I expect of my machine and how do I use it? Better 10 oil changes too many than one short; oil and filters are cheap compared to the investments you made in the purchase of your equipment or the untimely expensive repairs completed by your dealer due to lack of proper maintenance.

Considering the hourly door rates at your dealer, it should not take a calculator to figure out that routine maintenance and some parts will save you money in the long run.

If you do your own work, then start with the notes you made during the season. Grab the grease gun and start systematically and intentionally going around the machine. Look for leaks, worn or damaged parts and grease the machine at the same time. Mark down what you see and survey the whole machine! Only then can you make a sound management decision on what course of action to take with this particular piece of your assets.

Once you thoroughly examined the machine, you have a good picture of its condition and what it needs to serve you for another year. Or, perhaps a decision to replace the unit

might need to be made. And here again, if you do this over the winter you will not be caught off-guard by the time spring comes around.

Today there are many companies that offer a contract for fluid inspections. With this contract, you send a small sample of fluid away for testing, taken from the various reservoirs on the machine. By completing these

inspections once or twice a year, depending on the number of hours the machine is used, you get a good indication of the internal health of the machine.

Most companies will keep a record of the previous samples and will warn you if certain levels of contaminants exceed the safe range – which indicates a mechanical failure. Or the



Oil breaks down and, in the case of engine oil, it should be changed at least once a year.

companies will warn you if your oil or coolant is not serviceable anymore and should be changed.

This service might be to your advantage, especially for equipment that runs continuously. (When equipment is run regularly, the oil remains in a better condition than the oil in a machine run only periodically.) Instead of using the intervals recommended in the maintenance schedule, you can rely on the tests to keep you on track. This is especially the case with the use of synthetic fluid, which is becoming the norm. (The recommended change intervals are longer with synthetic fluids.)

It is your machine and your choice, but please do not blame the equipment for failing if you failed it in the first place. Equipment prices have risen dramatically over the last few years and, if you are like me, it has to serve you for several years. Use the winter months to protect your investments! **BF**

Jaap Kroondijk is a farm boy mechanic who lives near Woodstock.

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The ongoing supply management debate

The dairy and poultry industries are once again working to defend the system – this time from increased imports that would follow implementation of proposed trade deals with Europe and Pacific nations.

by BARRY WILSON

It should surprise no one that disgruntled Quebec dairy farmers were among the first to drizzle – if not rain – on Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's so-far successful parade. In its almost-half century of existence as a quasi-marketing monopoly for dairy, poultry and egg perishables that depends on legislation and political support, farmers never have been reluctant to take on their political benefactors when they think the politicians' support is wavering, particularly those producers from Quebec.

Then Agriculture Minister Eugene Whelan's milk bath on Parliament Hill in the 1970s comes to mind, as well as the relentless lobbying and sometimes violent farmer demonstra-

tions when Canadian politicians have been involved in trade negotiations that threatened system protections.

So when Canada's 23rd prime minister, buoyed by almost a year of walking on political waters of public approval, arrived in Quebec's Saguenay region in late August for a Liberal caucus meeting, more than 300 dairy farmers were there. They had tractors and signs to protest the lack of federal action to stop duty-free imports of diafiltered milk protein from the United States. Supply management sectors say these imports are costing Canadian producers many millions of dollars in lost sales.

These protests are the latest battle of many that system-dependent

beneficiaries have waged against free-market critics since supply management's creation in the 1960s and 1970s. These days, proposed trade deals with Europe and Pacific nations threaten to undermine the system if approved.

Supply management was created to support farmers undercut by cheap imports and unregulated markets. Federal legislation was passed in 1971 after a fierce House of Commons battle that pitted Alberta Progressive Conservative Jack Horner (later to be a Liberal minister) against agriculture minister Bud Olson (a former Alberta Social Credit MP turned Liberal).

The result of the Tory campaign was that the cattle industry was excluded from the system but the



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legislation was approved.

Actually, the battle to protect the Canadian dairy industry from cheap American imports stretches back at least 130 years. Then customs minister Mackenzie Bowell moved a parliamentary motion in April 1886 that “the importation into Canada of oleomargarine, butterine or other substitutes for butter is hereby prohibited under a penalty of \$200, together with the forfeiture of such goods and packages in which they are contained.”

And there have always been critics, usually consumer, academic and free enterprise opponents of what they see as a monopoly that hurts consumers and the poor by keeping domestic milk, egg and poultry prices higher than these products would be with more competition.

Current critics range from Conservative Party leadership candidate Maxime Bernier, who is promising to eliminate the system if elected, to



Digital Vision/Getty Images photo

“There is no depth in the argument that we have to end supply management altogether,” according to Sylvain Charlebois.

former Conservative/Liberal MP Martha Hall Findley, recently named president of the Calgary-based Canada West Foundation. Then there are the university economics professors who embrace free trade while happy to enjoy their tenured positions that protect their jobs.

Inside the Conservative Party, whose founding members were Reformers from the West opposed to

anything resembling protectionism, there has been little enthusiasm for Bernier’s proposal to eliminate supply management.

Former agriculture minister Gerry Ritz, a Saskatchewan grain farmer who came to Ottawa in 1997 as a Reformer, thinks a bold promise to end supply management is a non-starter. As minister, he was a strong supporter of the system.

“We have evolved,” Ritz said when reminded of Reform anti-supply management roots.

Sylvain Charlebois, dean of the Dalhousie University Faculty of Management in Halifax, offers the last word. He is not a fan of supply management restrictions but argues that any proposal to end the system would involve huge costs to buy out quota and a disruption in the affected industries.

Bernier consulted Charlebois on his policy. Charlebois said the candidate ignored his advice that a sudden end to supply management would create chaos and a huge government liability for quota value purchased under government policy.

“There is no depth in the argument that we have to end supply management altogether,” Charlebois said in an interview. “You have to deal with the legacy. Supply management is and will evolve but it will remain in some form.” **BF**

Barry Wilson is a member of the Parliamentary Press Gallery and specializes in agriculture.

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Farming from the sidelines

Growing a crop without stepping a foot in the field could soon be a reality.

The Hands Free Hectare project is expected to demonstrate the ease of automated farming, according to British researchers from **Harper Adams University** and **Precision Decisions Ltd.**

Researchers will grow a cereal crop from seeding to harvest completely robotically, according to the universi-

ty press release. “There is now no technological barrier to automated field agriculture,” says **Kit Franklin**, lecturer of agricultural engineering at Harper Adams. “This project gives us the opportunity to prove this and change current

public perception” about automated farming.

The university’s engineering department will adapt equipment that is readily available on the market to enable autonomous use.

The crop will be planted in 2017 in Shropshire County, England. **BF**



gpointstudio/Creative RF/Getty photo

Disease identification made easy

Farmers may soon be able to diagnose crop diseases as easily as taking a picture with their smartphones, according to a **Penn State University** release.

Researchers from Penn State and the **Swiss Federal Institute of Technology**



simazoran/Creative RF/Getty Images photo

built a network of computers with a 53,000-image database that can accurately identify a crop disease using only a photo.

David Hughes, assistant professor of entomology and biology at Penn State, says developing countries lack educational resources for farmers and, therefore, could benefit from

this technology to secure their yields.

In North America, crop specialists or extension workers could use the technology when working with farmers. Gardeners may also be interested in the database, Hughes said in the release.

The database used in the study covers 14 different crops and 26 diseases. The beta model reached an accuracy rate of 99 per cent, when filtering 1,000 pictures, according to the release. **BF**

Australia’s one-of-a-kind tomato farm

Operations for a first-of-its-kind southern Australian tomato farm began full force in October, according to news website *Renew Economy*. **Sundrop Farms** uses both solar power and seawater.

A concentrated solar power tower produces Sundrop Farms’ electricity and heat. This system also powers the desalinization of seawater on-site. The

farm produces 15 million kg of tomatoes annually.

“Here in Australia, we have a long-term commitment to R&D and innovation and are looking to build future projects in this state and around the country,” **Philipp**



Videowok_art/Creative RF/Getty Images photo

Saumweber, CEO of the facility, said in the article.

The farm cost approximately C\$201 million to build. **BF**

Organic matter for drought protection

Many industry experts focus on the development of new varieties to address drought conditions. But, “it might not be necessary to put all the stress of climate adaptation and mitigation on new varieties,” said **Adam Davis**, **USDA** ecologist and **University of Illinois** (U of I) associate professor, in a university release.

Rather, high organic content and soil’s water holding capacity are also

key to maintaining yields in a drought, according to a recent study from the U of I and other Midwestern institutions.

Organic content improves with management techniques combining no-till systems, cover crops, longer crop rotations and the use of manure.

The study examined weather, soil and yields from multiple locations across Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota

and Pennsylvania. In total, researchers collected and examined 15 years of data. The research was published in the journal *PLOS One* in August. **BF**





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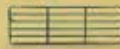
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