

2026 FALL
FARM
EDITION



Exeter Examiner
N E W S P A P E R

Autonomous robots aim to cut nitrogen fertilizer needs

JOHN MINER

Examiner Reporter

If Maize Runner succeeds, corn growers will be able to cut the amount of nitrogen fertilizer they use while boosting yields.

Maize Runner is a fifth-generation robot that is currently being tested on more than 3,000 acres on 31 farms across Ontario by Waterloo-based Upside Robotics.

The idea behind the lightweight solar-powered robot is to regularly spoon feed nitrogen to corn plants throughout the growing season, matching the growth requirements of the plant.

At present, farmers using current fertilizer application equipment can make one or two nitrogen applications during the season, but much of the nitrogen is gone by post-tassel when the corn plant still requires about 40 per cent of the nitrogen.

In contrast, Maize Runner can apply fertilizer throughout the growing season, covering between 20 to 25 acres a day.

The autonomous robot typically applies fertilizer for about four hours before returning to a base station to recharge, refill and head back out again. It can run 24-7.

"We are hoping to get to a point where one robot by itself can manage at least a 100-acre field, making weekly applications," Upside Robotics agronomist Tanya Franklin told participants attending the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association farm day at the Huronview Demo Farm near Clinton.

The field results from the nitrogen robot application have been positive with some farms cutting their nitrogen applications by as much as 70 per cent and maintaining yields.

Upside Robotics was co-founded in 2023 by Jana Tian, a chemical engineer, and Sam Dugan, who grew up on a farm and trained in mechatronics at the University of Waterloo.

The first two generations of robots developed by Upside Robotics, Buddy and Marley, were driven by an Xbox controller that required an operator to walk behind the robot through the whole field.

"We put in about 30,000 steps a day to get those applications done," said Franklin.

There were also significant issues with motors quitting. By the end of the season co-op students literally hooked up a harness to the robot and dragged them through the field to get the nitrogen applied, she said.

Last year, the liquid fertilizer tanks mounted on the robots above the computers and electronics leaked.

"We were blowing up robots daily," Franklin said.

The robots also relied on GPS and field maps to navigate between the rows. The maps turned out to be out by as much as 150 centimetres, causing the robots to trample the corn.

"We actually had to shut down the entire fleet for about two and a half weeks at the beginning of the season."

This year's robot model, Maize Runner, no longer relies on planting maps to manoeuvre between the rows.

It is equipped with front and back cameras, a multispectral camera, canopy camera, temperature and humidity sensor, magnetometer, and gyroscope. Data is collected metre-by-metre as the robot moves through the field.

"It's really cool, the amount of data that we're gathering on plant health, on how



(JOHN MINER PHOTO)

Speaking at the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association farm day at the Huronview Demo Farm, Upside Robotics agronomist Tanya Franklin describes how the Maize Runner robot can cut nitrogen fertilizer requirements. The solar powered autonomous robot covers 20 to 25 acres a day.

weather conditions affect things," said Franklin.

The base station for the robot is equipped with a rainfall sensor and temperature sensor. If it is going to rain within two hours, robots at the base station can no longer go to the field and robots in the field are programmed to return to the base.

If the base station detects rain, the robots in the field are automatically shut down and stay in place in the field until it

dries out enough that they can start back up, return to the station, and recharge.

Franklin said she doesn't have a price on the robot system yet.

"We know we want to sit in a spot where we can get the hardware reliable enough that when we sell it to you, you don't really have to do anything with it for about three years at least.

"Year one, at minimum, it breaks even. Year two and three are for profit. That is the goal."

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Fall Farm Frolic invites visitors to explore Huron County farms

EXETER EXAMINER STAFF

Staff Contribution

The County of Huron is inviting residents and visitors to get a behind-the-scenes look at local agriculture during the Fall Farm Frolic, taking place Saturday, Sept. 19, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

This free, self-guided event will open the gates at seven farms and agricultural businesses across Huron County, giving visitors an opportunity to meet local farmers, learn how food is grown and produced, meet farm animals, shop for local products, and experience the diversity of agriculture in the region.

Participating locations include:

- Weth Mushrooms
- Bayfield Lavender Farm
- Harm-N-E Longhorns
- Govers Family Farm and Pumpkin Patch
- Maelström Winery
- Malette Family Farm
- Meeting Place Organic Farm

Adding a creative twist to the traditional farm tour, the Huron Arts and Heritage Network (HAHN) has organized arts programming at the participating locations. Visitors can experience live music, visual arts, demonstrations, hands-on activities, and performances while exploring the farms.

Programming includes:

- Encaustic artist Linda Wiebe at Weth Mushrooms
- Cartoonist and illustrator Mike Shiell and the Huron Harp School at Bayfield Lavender Farm
- Pumpkin painting with artist Abby Bos at Govers Family Farm and Pumpkin Patch
- Live music from Matthew Hussey at Maelström Winery
- Traditional rug hooking demonstrations at Malette Family Farm
- A scene from Aylmer's Ghost performed by playwright Ted Johns at Meeting Place Organic Farm.

"The Fall Farm Frolic is a chance for people to experience Huron County agriculture in a fun and approachable way," said Huron County tourism officer Rick Sickinger. "Visitors can talk directly with farmers, discover the variety of food and agricultural products produced here, and enjoy some great arts and cultural experiences along the way."

Visitors can choose the farms they would like to explore and create their own route through the Huron County countryside. Farms will be open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., making it easy to visit several locations throughout the day.

VIP Fall Farm Frolic Experience

For visitors who would rather leave the driving to someone else, a limited-ticket



(COUNTY OF HURON PHOTO)

Fall Farm Frolic will open the doors of seven local farms to visitors looking to learn more about agriculture.

VIP experience is also available for \$75 plus HST per person. VIP guests will travel by highway coach to all seven locations, departing from and returning to the Walmart Supercentre parking lot in Goderich. The experience includes farm visits, tours, arts programming, a swag

bag of local goodies, and lunch and a wine tasting at Maelström Winery.

For the complete list of participating farms, locations, programming, downloadable event map and VIP ticket information, visit the Ontario's West Coast Fall Farm Frolic webpage.

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Huron, Perth honeybee hive losses lower than many areas

JOHN MINER

Examiner Reporter

When it comes to beehive losses, Huron and Perth County beekeepers can consider themselves fortunate compared to much of the province.

According to a spring survey by the Ontario Beekeepers Association, the winter hive losses in the region that includes Huron and Perth averaged 17.6 per cent, the second lowest losses in the province.

But beekeepers in some other regions reported losing more than half their hives, including Northeastern Ontario, Greater Toronto and Hamilton area and Central Ontario. Only Northwestern Ontario had lower losses than Huron and Perth.

The overall average loss for Ontario was 45.3 per cent.

South Huron beekeeper Aaron Neeb calculates that in order to break even beekeepers can only afford to lose up to 20 per cent of their hives over winter.

"Hive loss is a serious issue for the beekeeping industry," he said.

Neeb said the lower losses this past winter for the Huron and Perth region, which also includes Grey, Bruce and Wellington counties, is extremely positive news for beekeepers in the area.

Last year the beekeepers in the region weren't as fortunate, reporting losses of 39.5 per cent.

The top reasons for hive losses, according to the Ontario Beekeepers Association survey, were winter weather, small clusters going into winter, and queen issues.

Beekeepers reporting overwinter suc-

cess attributed their lower losses to effective Varroa mite control, good sized clusters going into winter, and effective fall feeding of their bees.

The mites are a serious issue for beekeepers, requiring regular monitoring and sometimes multiple treatments, Neeb said. Populations can grow exponentially during a season.

High mite levels can cause viruses and diseases that are difficult to eliminate.

In order to recover from losses, some beekeepers split surviving hives into two colonies, but that is a bit of a catch-22.

"Yes, you have a new hive, but it is not nearly as strong as it would be if left as a single colony. This can result in lower honey yields and, for some beekeepers with pollination contracts, fewer viable colonies to provide for pollination," Neeb said.

An added issue is that by the time fall arrives beekeepers have two colonies that require supplemental feed and treatments to make it through the winter.

Ontario beekeepers also try to recover from hive losses by importing queen bees from places such as Hawaii, California, Chile, and New Zealand. The downside is these bees are less likely to survive Canadian winters than queens reared in Canada, Neeb said.

A positive development for Ontario beekeepers, according to the provincial association, was the registration this spring of new mite control products.

Another initiative was announced by the University of Guelph — the Low Varroa Growth breeding program that aims to build resistance to the mites.

The research involves sampling hives twice in a season to compare mite levels



(JOHN MINER PHOTO)

South Huron beekeeper Aaron Neeb says the lower winter hive losses is extremely good news.

and then selecting the ones with lower mite numbers for new bee colonies.

The Ontario Beekeepers Association is also calling for investments in research and extension to help beekeepers be

more resilient in the face of high winter losses.

Ontario's beekeepers produced \$40.8 million of honey last year, up from \$33.4 million in 2024.

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Researchers test adding dry bean flour to yogurt



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Dr. Shari Hekmat of Western University says dry bean flour added to probiotic yogurt could create a premium functional food.

JOHN MINER

Examiner Reporter

If you value the nutrition in beans and you like yogurt, you could be in luck in the future.

Researchers at Western University (UWO), supported by Ontario Bean Growers and Hensall Co-op, have tested whether it is possible to add dry bean flour to probiotic yogurt to create a new premium functional food that would be accepted by consumers.

The answer, according to UWO food and nutritional sciences professor Dr. Shari Hekmat, is yes.

Updating bean growers on the research project she leads, Hekmat said the results show that probiotic yogurt, fortified with bean flour, could provide Ontario bean growers with opportunities beyond their traditional markets.

"Research has shown that nowadays consumers are looking for foods that are nutritious, that are high in protein, low in fat, high in fibre, and also those that support digestive health," Hekmat told the Ontario Bean Growers research day at the Huron Research Station.

Probiotic yogurt contains live beneficial bacteria that survive passing through the digestive system and can outcompete disease-causing bacteria. With regular yogurt, the bacteria used in the fermentation process does not survive.

For the research, Hekmat's group selected otebo, black,

navy, and red kidney beans that were supplied by Hensall Co-op. Using a high-speed electric blender, the beans were milled into flour.

Crucial questions were whether adding bean flour to the yogurt would inhibit the fermentation process and reduce the beneficial bacteria in the yogurt. In order to be labelled probiotic, yogurt has to have at least a million live bacteria per gram.

It turned out yogurt with three percent bean flour added had 100 times the required amount for labelling purposes.

"That's very good news," Hekmat said.

The researchers recruited 94 people between the ages of 18 and 55 to evaluate the flavour, appearance, and texture of the bean yogurt on a nine-point scale with a score of one being "dislike extremely" and nine being "like extremely."

The yogurts with the different bean varieties were pegged at about six, the "like slightly" category, which is considered acceptable, Hekmat said.

A next step for the bean yogurt project is to see if a dairy processor would be willing to commercialize the product.

Work will also continue on evaluating consumer preferences, evaluating the nutritional composition of the yogurt, and exploring additional food applications of bean flour.

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Drone use expanding on farms



(JOHN MINER PHOTOS)

Health Canada approved the use of drones for spraying agricultural crops in June. This unit was demonstrated in August at the Huronview Demonstration Farm near Clinton during an Ontario Soil and Crop Association farm day.

One of the latest agricultural drones to hit the market, the DJI Agras T100 can lift a payload up to 100 kilograms

JOHN MINER
Examiner Reporter

On June 30 this year, the agricultural drone industry got the news they had been waiting for from Health Canada. Already being used on Ontario farms for crop scouting, seeding and spreading fertilizer, Health Canada announced drones could now be employed to apply pesticides that are registered for aerial spraying. Companies selling agricultural drones say they've seen increased interest from farmers and custom spray operators since the Health Canada decision. "We're seeing both individual farmers purchasing drones for their own operations and farmers choosing to hire custom operators," said Myles Weishar, marketing manager with Drone Spray Canada.

Weisher said the company is also servicing a growing network of applicators and people looking to start agricultural drone spraying businesses and provide application services to farmers. When comparing equipment pricing, the drone can be an attractive option compared to traditional ground sprayers with additional benefits, including no soil compaction or crop damage, he said. "Timing can also be critical after a heavy rain, and a drone can get into fields when ground equipment may not be able to." When considering investing in a drone, Weishar said many farmers want to have an operator come out and try it on some of their acres first. Since it's a new technology, they want to see how well it works, and once they see the results, many end up purchasing a drone. On a global basis, the market for agri-

cultural drones has become a multi-billion dollar business in a few short years. Management consulting firm MarketsandMarkets estimates sales will hit US\$3.45 billion this year and grow to US\$14.42 billion by 2031. Canada lagged behind other countries, including the United States, Australia and Japan, in allowing drones to spray pesticides on farm fields. In announcing the move, Health Canada said the technology offers farmers an innovative, precise and more cost-effective tool for pest management. "By helping growers reach fields and areas that may be difficult to access using conventional equipment, it can support timely crop protection, reduce operational challenges and help safeguard crop yields." Drones also can have a safety advantage compared to conventional aerial and some ground application methods,

according to Health Canada, because the drone pilot is not in close contact with the equipment during application. Most pesticide exposure for operators with drones happens during mixing, loading and maintenance, suggesting the risk is unlikely to be higher than with conventional equipment. As for pesticide residues on crops, Health Canada said studies have concluded residues are no higher with drones than those resulting from conventional application methods. Feeding the global market for agricultural drones, manufacturers have rapidly introduced larger and more sophisticated units with features such as position memory and obstacle detection. Launched last year, for instance by the Chinese technology company DJI, the DJI Agras T100 doubled the previous model's capacity with the ability to lift a payload of up to 100 kilograms.

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Can seasonal patterns help inform fertilizer purchasing decisions?

LEIGH ANDERSON

Farm Credit Canada

As producers turn their attention to the 2027 growing season, buying fertilizer remains one of the most important — and uncertain — crop input decisions. The return of Chinese fertilizer exports has improved supply prospects for some nutrients, but ongoing geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and the potential for disruptions to trade through the Strait of Hormuz continue to create upside price risk. At the same time, energy markets and global trade flows remain important drivers of fertilizer costs.

Against this backdrop, one question consistently comes up: How should producers approach fertilizer purchases in an increasingly uncertain market? In this report, we examine current fertilizer market conditions and explore how historical pricing patterns can help inform purchasing decisions amid ongoing uncertainty.

Fertilizer markets are sending mixed signals

Current market indicators highlight the diverging outlooks for nitrogen and phosphate fertilizers heading into 2027. Urea prices in the U.S. Gulf fertilizer market have retreated significantly from the highs reached earlier in 2026 and now sit roughly 15 per cent below pre-conflict

levels, while DAP prices at New Orleans (NOLA) remain approximately 25 per cent above pre-conflict levels. The contrast highlights the different forces shaping nitrogen and phosphate markets. Unlike nitrogen and phosphate, potash prices have remained comparatively stable over the past year.

While Canadian fertilizer prices generally follow U.S. Gulf and NOLA benchmarks, transportation costs, exchange rates, regional supply-demand conditions, and retailer inventories can influence the extent and timing of price changes. As a result, declines in benchmark prices do not necessarily translate into equivalent reductions in Canadian fertilizer prices.

Nitrogen markets easing, but risks remain

Part of the decline in urea prices reflects the seasonal slowdown that follows North American planting, a period often referred to as the summer lull in fertilizer markets. Prices have also softened due to the return of Chinese urea exports after several years of limited participation in global markets, improving product availability and easing pressure on nitrogen prices.

However, lower nitrogen prices should not be mistaken for lower risk. The Middle East remains a critical supplier of fertilizer products, feedstocks and ener-

gy, while the Strait of Hormuz remains a key global trade route. Any disruption to regional trade flows, shipping routes or natural gas markets could quickly reverse recent price declines.

Phosphate markets remain fundamentally tight

Phosphate markets continue to tell a different story. Elevated costs for sulphur, ammonia, and natural gas — the primary inputs in phosphate production — have squeezed producer margins. So much so that in some cases, phosphate production has even been curtailed. With the Middle East accounting for nearly half of global sulphur trade, ongoing conflict in the region risks further increasing phosphate production costs and constraining supply.

Also supporting phosphate prices is the uncertainty surrounding Chinese exports. While lower U.S. tariffs on Moroccan phosphate may encourage some additional North American imports, they are unlikely to materially loosen global market conditions. Chinese export policy remains a key watch item heading into 2027.

Managing uncertainty through purchasing decisions

With fertilizer prices remaining difficult to predict, many farms are focusing on timing of purchases as a risk management tool. Most farms know their expected crop rotation and fertilizer requirements well before spring, and while prices remain uncertain, historical seasonal patterns can provide useful context for purchasing decisions.

Nitrogen exhibits the strongest seasonality of the major fertilizers. Over the past five years, Canadian retail prices have typically been the weakest during late summer and fall before strengthening into the spring application season, with average values peaking in April and May.

Phosphate displays a more moderate but still noticeable seasonal pattern. Prices for Canadian farmers tend to be relatively softer during the second half of the calendar year before gradually strengthening ahead of spring seeding.

In contrast, Canadian potash retail prices have exhibited relatively modest seasonal price fluctuations in recent years, giving producers greater flexibility to manage cash flow.

After summer fill programs, farmers are typically left weighing purchases between fall and spring application windows. Those with storage capacity may be able to separate purchase timing from application timing, while others may use supplier programs that allow fertilizer to be priced ahead of delivery.

Recent experience highlights why these decisions matter. Many producers viewed fertilizer prices as unattractive during summer fill programs last year, resulting in limited uptake. Fall fertilizer application was also weaker than normal, pushing a larger share of fertilizer demand into the winter and spring months.

Fertilizer purchasing decisions should also be considered alongside grain marketing plans. As discussed in our recent grains and oilseeds report, historical crop pricing patterns can help inform grain marketing decisions amid market uncertainty. Locking in favourable crop prices can help offset higher fertilizer costs and improve margin certainty heading into 2027.

Bottom line

Geopolitical events this past year have highlighted how quickly fertilizer market conditions can change. Historical pricing patterns suggest nitrogen and phosphate prices often strengthen into the spring application season, contrasting with potash prices which tend to show greater stability. While there is no guarantee markets will follow their typical seasonal path, the latter can be useful in guiding fertilizer purchasing decisions.

Many producers appear to be taking a wait-and-see approach as fertilizer markets move through the fall and into the new year. Given the uncertainty that remains, a phased purchasing strategy may be worth considering. While it will not always result in the lowest price, it can help balance opportunity, risk and flexibility



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Ontario accepting new applications for the Rural Ontario Development Program

EXETER EXAMINER STAFF

Staff Contribution

Huron-Bruce MPP Lisa Thompson has announced that a new round of applications is now open for the Rural Ontario Development (ROD) Program.

Applications will be accepted from Aug. 17 to Oct. 1, 2026.

The Rural Ontario Development Program replaces the Rural Economic Development (RED) Program.

To qualify for the ROD Program, your organization must be a municipality, a not-for-profit organization, an Indigenous community or organization, a local services board, or a small business with one to 20 employees. The ROD Program provides cost-share funding for projects that help rural communities:

- address barriers and build capacity for economic development
- to attract, retain and expand businesses
- attract and retain investment and jobs
- strengthen regional partnerships and economic resilience
- address workforce development challenges
- transform community assets to drive economic development

Small brick and mortar businesses in rural Ontario

with one to 20 employees can apply through the Business Development Stream, which offers up to 35 per cent cost-share, to a maximum of \$10,000.

As well, municipalities, Indigenous communities, local services boards and not-for-profit organizations in rural Ontario can apply through the following streams:

- Economic diversification, competitiveness and capacity building: projects that support communities to build economic development capacity and implement strategies that increase competitiveness to retain businesses, attract investment and enhance growth.

- Strategies and plans: projects will develop strategies or plans that will enhance the ability of communities to be prepared for and engage in economic development activities. This stream offers up to 50% cost-share, up to \$50,000.

- Economic diversification and competitiveness: projects will support the implementation of an existing economic development plan or strategy. This stream offers up to 50% cost-share, up to \$150,000.

- Capacity building events: projects that support organizations in building community capacity to deliver economic development activities. This stream offers up to 35% cost-share, up to \$10,000.

The workforce development, attraction and retention stream funds projects that support communities to implement strategies and/or to undertake initiatives for attracting and retaining workers. This stream offers up to 50 per cent cost-share, up to \$150,000.

The community infrastructure enhancements stream funds projects that update or transform community assets that have been identified as important to the community's economy. This stream offers up to 35 per cent cost-share, with large projects eligible from \$25,000 to \$250,000 and for small projects eligible up to \$25,000.

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Huron Tractor announces 2026 scholarship recipients

EXETER EXAMINER STAFF

Staff Contribution

The recipients of the 2026 Huron Tractor Scholarship Program have been announced.

The annual scholarship program provides recipients with a \$2,000 cheque to help support their education in pursuit of higher learning through post-secondary education and the long-term sustainability of Ontario agriculture.

With plans to open the 2027 program next spring, applicants must be enrolling into their first year at a recognized post-secondary educational institution in an agricultural program with a full course load, with preference given to applicants within Huron Tractor's trade area.

(PHOTOS BY HURON TRACTOR)



Megan Foster — Ilderton, Ontario (University of Guelph Ridgetown, Diploma of Agriculture).



Samantha Parnell — Tiny, Ontario (University of Guelph, Bachelor of Agriculture Business).



Jack Segeren — Blenheim, Ontario (University of Guelph, Bachelor of Science in Agriculture.)



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Huron Tractor announces 2026 scholarship recipients

(PHOTOS BY HURON TRACTOR)



Larissa Walker — Stayner, Ontario (University of Guelph, Bachelor of Science in Agriculture - Co-op).



Connor Hern — Exeter, Ontario (Fanshawe College, Red Seal Welding). Connor is the son of Chris Hern, parts manager at Huron Tractor, Hyde Park.



Hewett — Leamington, Ontario (University of Windsor, Bachelor of English Language and Literature). Grace is the daughter of Eric Hewett, parts representative at Huron Tractor, Comber.



Gavin Stacey — London, Ontario (Western University, Bachelor of Social Science). Gavin is the son of Katey Ross, service writer at Huron Tractor, Thamesford.



Jillian Anderson — Chatham, Ontario (St. Clair College, Diploma in Paramedicine). Jillian is the daughter of Scott Anderson, service technician at Huron Tractor, Chatham.

Huron County's fields of gold: winter wheat

JUDY FINKBEINER JOHNSON

Examiner Correspondent

There is a long history of growing wheat in Huron County and area from the time the area was settled. The 1841 seal of the County of Huron clearly shows the importance of wheat here, with a sheaf of wheat prominently displayed.

As land in the Huron Tract was being cleared, the pioneers planted their wheat crop before they could remove the massive tree stumps and roots of the old growth forest, putting the seed kernels in the spaces between them. With the start of the Crimean War in 1854, Britain banned Russian wheat and turned to Canada for supplies for its military and civilian populations, resulting in surging demand and much higher prices. This was a key factor in the region becoming a major grower and exporter of wheat. The proximity of the Port of Goderich was also beneficial.

Huron Tract's precious wheat reached Britain along various transportation routes. At first horse-drawn wagons carried the wheat along primitive roads to Huron Road, now Highway 8, to reach the port.

When the railway came to Goderich, first Buffalo and Lake Huron Railway in 1858, and assumed by Grand Trunk in 1864, it speeded up transportation of the crops. The first elevator was built and improvements made to this important deep water harbour to accommodate larger ships that carried grains through the Great Lakes, rivers, and canals to eastern ports. Shipbuilding boomed, with many more vessels needed to cross the dangerous North Atlantic to Britain. Wheat cargo ships were usually wooden barques, sailing ships with at least three masts, with the foremast and mainmast square-rigged.

Until the late 1940s and early 1950s, wheat stooks dotted the fields in Huron County and area during wheat harvest in the era before mechanical drying of the crop. At first wheat was cut by hand with scythes. Later it was cut by binders and tied into sheaves. Several of these bundles were stacked together into stooks, stalks

down and heads up, in a conical structure that allowed the crop to dry before threshing.

A threshing machine arrived on farms before the arrival of combines. Threshing days were major events for all concerned. Farmers formed threshing bees, where several came together to feed the behemoth that separated the straw and chaff from the wheat kernels. It was hard work and required nutritious fueling of the workers who laboured under the sun.

The farm kitchen was a hive of activity with copious amounts of food in preparation from meats and fowl, fresh vegetables cooked and in salads, to an array of baking including a selection of pies and cookies. Jugs of cool water and lemonade were essential for hydration. Curious children on the farm also had their job: marching orders were to be quiet and stay out of the way.

When one farm's fields were finished, the machine and the farmers moved on to the next to reap the harvest before the weather changed. Loose straw was pitched onto horse-drawn wagons that were hauled up barn hills for the straw to be raised up into the mows.

Everything changed when farmers purchased combines to harvest crops. Tractors hauled early combines and loaded the wheat into bins to be taken to local elevators. Straw was baled into small square bales and piled high on wagons.

Self-propelled combines were the next step, with today's equipment capable of harvesting up to 30 acres (over 12 hectares) an hour. Wider headers up to 15.2 metres can harvest faster. For maximum efficiency in the field, farmers often use a "chaser buggy," a tractor pulling a grain cart driving alongside the moving combine to empty the wheat from the combine hopper/tank rather than stopping harvesting to unload into bins or trucks for transporting to elevators.

Some days of the wheat harvest of 2026 presented a very unusual challenge. Wildfires from the northwest created smoky conditions, so dense that the air looked like fog all day. In mid-July an Orange Level Air Quality warning was issued

for Huron Perth. Outdoor workers were among those cautioned about activity during these extraordinary conditions. For several days from July 15, the air was so hazy with particulate matter that the dust from the combines was hidden, as well as much of the harvesting equipment in the fields.

In spite of sometimes difficult conditions for winter wheat here during its growing season and harvest in 2026, there were yields per acre of 110 to 125 bushels (2.99 to 3.40 metric tonnes) of wheat. StatsCan reports for the 2025 harvest was an average of 91.3 bushels per acre in Ontario. Changing conditions in the world have resulted in a recent rally of wheat prices, particularly because of Russian and Ukraine crops being affected.

"The wheat harvest is usually 2 to 3 weeks but in 2026 most of the wheat in this area was off in 6 or 7 days. At peak time we are able to receive over 2,000 Metric Tonnes per hour. With the wheat being so dry this summer, there was also less drying involved than usual," said Ondrejicka Elevators president Mike Ondrejicka. "There are more than one million acres of winter wheat grown in Ontario, and three counties here account for at least one quarter of that entire acreage. Here farmers plant mostly Canadian Eastern Soft Red Winter Wheat (CESRW). Huron grows about 100,000 acres of winter wheat, Middlesex 80,000 acres, and Perth 70,000 acres. Wheat is an excellent rotational crop that results in corn yields 10 to 15 bushels higher for the next year."

Ontario produces more than 80 per cent of Canada's total winter wheat. There are three main Canadian Eastern wheat crops grown: Soft Red Winter for cookies, crackers, and cereal, Hard Red Winter for pasta and flatbreads; Soft White for pastries, light-coloured cereals, and cakes.

The secondary crop to come off wheat fields is bright golden straw with many uses. After combining the wheat it is usually baled into large rectangular or circular bales. Among straw's uses: a low-protein, filler/fiber feed ingredient for dairy operations, bedding for livestock, mulch, and mushroom compost. Canadian com-

panies are using wheat straw in a variety of environmentally friendly ways, to reduce dependency on petroleum-based products.

Bioplastic products like wheat stalk drinking straws, storage containers, decking, fencing, particle board, fuel logs, solid fuel, resins, high-quality pulp for paper and packaging are being produced and many more are in the research stages with collaborators like universities.

When Canadian astronaut Jeremy Hansen, who grew up on a southwestern Ontario farm, wanted treats to share with his Artemis II crewmates on their lunar flyby beyond the far side of the moon, he took iconic Canadian maple cream sandwich cookies.

"Ontario's soft red winter wheat reached a height no other wheat had before," wrote Dana Dickerson in Ontario Grain Farmers Magazine. "It is, in fact, the distinctive quality of Ontario soft red winter wheat that helps Commercial Bakeries Corp's maple cream cookies achieve their signature shape and fine details."

From the first fields of the Huron Tract to a package of cookies carried to the Moon and beyond, Ontario wheat has been making history for more than 300 years.



1841 Seal for the County of Huron with prominent wheat sheaf.



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Huron County's fields of gold: winter wheat

(PHOTOS BY BARRY JOHNSON)



Combine with chase buggy alongside, emptying hopper/tank while continuing to harvest.



A wall of wheat straw in large bales ready for transport



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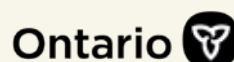
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Breakfast on the Farm draws thousands to Huron County



Many volunteers, including farm organizations and neighbours, came together to answer questions from inquisitive visitors on different aspects of this modern working dairy farm.

EXETER EXAMINER STAFF

Staff Contribution

Thousands of visitors from across southwestern Ontario got a close-up look at dairy farming on July 25, 2026, as Farm and Food Care Ontario's Breakfast on the Farm welcomed the public to the Joe and Barb Terpstra Family Dairy Farm in Huron County.

The Joe and Barb Terpstra Family

Dairy Farm, located in the suburbs of Cranbrook, near Brussels and Blyth, were amazed at the number of people who took up the cause with an invitation to come and visit.

Joe Terpstra, in welcoming everyone to breakfast on their farm, thought there might be a few hundred show up, but Kelly Daynard, executive director of Farm and Food Care Ontario, stated with a smile, "there might be a few



(GARY WEST PHOTOS)

From left are Janelle and Cole Terpstra, Tanner Boven and Emily Terpstra, Luke Forbes and Alison Terpstra, Barb and Joe Terpstra, and Senator Rob Black. Missing is the oldest Terpstra daughter Chelsey and Jared Skinner, and their three children Charlotte, Archie and Walter.

more than that!"

Some visitors had a hard time believing that there was no charge for parking, while volunteers were at every corner to guide visitors along and answer questions.

The \$5 breakfast included back bacon, eggs and cheese on a bun along with milk and ice cream.

Food donations came from local pork producers, egg farmers, dairy producers and grain farmers.

The Terpstas milk 400 cows in a 50-cow DeLaval rotary milking parlour. They farm 1,200 acres of rich Huron County soil, and grow a crop rotation of alfalfa, corn, soybeans and wheat.

Joe and his wife Barb began farming on their own in 1975, and gradually over the years increased the size of their herd as their family grew. Their daughter also has 130 ewes and raises lamb, while their son has a 30 cow/calf beef operation.



There were volunteers who knew how to answer questions about milk and dairy farming, as visitors were able to get up close and personal with the Terpstra herd of Holstein cows. From left Macy Tremere, Steve and Arletta Hallahan from Blyth, and Anne Marie and Steven McGregor from Kippen.

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FARM SAFETY

FCC renews partnership with Canadian Centre for Agricultural Wellbeing to support National Farmer Wellness Network and Crisis Line

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR AGRICULTURAL WELLBEING

Contributed Article

Farm Credit Canada (FCC) and the Canadian Centre for Agricultural Wellbeing (CCAW) have announced a renewed partnership to sustain and expand the National Farmer Wellness Network (NFWN) and National Farmer Crisis Line, 1-866-FARMS01 (1-866-327-6701).

The renewed investment of \$1.8 million over three years (\$600,000 annually) will allow the program to continue providing tailored, no-cost mental health and crisis support to Canada's farmers, farm families, and agricultural workers.

"The response to the National Farmer Wellness Network Crisis Line since its launch has confirmed what we always knew, there is a deep and urgent need for mental health support that speaks the language of farming," said Canadian Centre for Agricultural Wellbeing CEO and lead scientist Dr. Briana Hagen. "FCC's renewed investment means we can continue building on this foundation, reaching more farmers and agricultural workers who need immediate, culturally informed support. This partnership is about more than a phone line; it's about ensuring Canada's agricultural community knows it is seen, valued, and never alone."

Since launching in February 2025, the National Farmer Wellness Network Crisis Line has connected agricultural workers across Canada with licensed mental health professionals trained through the Canadian

Agricultural Literacy Program (CALP), specialists who understand the unique pressures of farming life. The renewal ensures that this vital service continues uninterrupted.

"Farming and ranching asks a lot of people," said FCC president and CEO Justine Hendricks. "Behind every operation are individuals and families managing uncertainty, long hours and immense responsibility. That's why FCC is proud to continue its support to the National Farmer Wellness Network so farmers and farm families have access to trusted mental health support from professionals who understand the unique realities of agriculture, whenever they need it."

Farming remains one of Canada's most demanding occupations. Financial volatility, geographic isolation, unpredictable weather, and the emotional weight of caring for land and livestock create compounding mental health pressures that general support services are often ill-equipped to address. The NFWN Crisis Line was built specifically to meet farmers where they are, and this renewed commitment ensures it will keep doing so.

"Renewing this commitment means that farmers and farm families across Canada can continue to count on us, not just in a moment of crisis, but as part of an ongoing network of care," said NFWN chief programming officer Deborah Vanberkel. "The trust that agricultural communities have placed in this program is something we do not take lightly. With FCC's continued support, we are able to grow that trust and deepen our reach into every province."



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FARM SAFETY

OFA urges farmers to put safety first

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF AGRICULTURE

Staff Contribution

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) is encouraging farmers, farm families and rural communities to make safety on the farm a priority all year long.

To support farmers with practical tools and information, OFA has released a farm safety fact sheet, designed to help identify risks, start conversations and strengthen safety practices on farms of all sizes and types.

"The farm is more than a workplace, it's also home," said farmer and OFA executive member Paul Maurice. "Safety starts with planning and awareness, not luck. Taking the time to think through tasks, identify risks and put simple precautions in place can make all the difference in preventing injuries and making sure everyone comes home safely at the end of the day."

Common farm safety risks include long days and fatigue, heavy machinery and moving equipment, time pressure from weather and field conditions, road travel with slow-moving vehicles, multiple people

working closely together, or working with animals that can behave unpredictably. When fatigue sets in or distractions creep in, the risk of injury rises quickly.

"Simple actions — like wearing high-visibility gear, maintaining equipment, or taking an extra moment to assess a task — can help prevent life-changing accidents," said Maurice. "Farm safety is everyone's responsibility, and it starts with each of us knowing what to do to stay safe."

A few top farm safety tips:

- Keep equipment fixed and up to date.
- Take a break when you're tired or fatigued, and don't cut corners when you're in a rush.
- Shut down equipment before making adjustments or dislodging a blockage and keep safety guards in place.
- Don't let kids play around work sites or near equipment.
- Have a first aid kit and emergency contact numbers handy and take a charged phone with you when you head out for the day.
- When frustration hits because of breakdowns or long hours, take a breath, step back, and reassess before moving on.



OFA logo.

The full fact sheet is available at: ofa.on.ca/resources/tips-for-staying-safe-on-the-farm.

Farmers and rural residents can also access practical safety gear through the OFA online store, including high-visibility vests and farm safety signage to improve awareness around equipment, roadways and farmyards. Visit store.ofa.on.ca/collections/all.

To learn more about farm safety: agsafetyweek.ca.

National survey of farmer and rancher mental health now open

EXETER EXAMINER STAFF

Staff Contribution

A survey of farmers and ranchers across Canada is now open, asking those in the agricultural sector about their mental health experiences.

The survey is being conducted by the

University of Guelph in collaboration with the Canadian Centre for Agricultural Wellbeing (CCAW), making it the third national survey of its kind to be conducted through the partnership.

Through the survey, farmers and ranchers from all regions and commodities in Canada are able to share their experiences related to stress, anxiety, depression,

burnout, resilience, and coping.

Once the survey is completed, the results will help to provide insights into mental health in agriculture through comparisons to national surveys that were completed in 2016 and 2021, helping to identify trends over time.

According to the Canadian Centre for Agricultural Wellbeing, broad participa-

tion is essential to ensuring the findings reflect the diverse realities of farming and ranching across Canada to help inform future research, programs, and policy.

The survey is confidential, and no identifying information is collected as part of the process.

For more information or to complete the survey, visit ccaw.ca.

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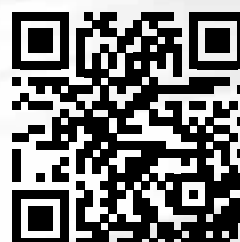
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Trivitt ministry packs gift bags, serves lunch for Huron farmworkers



(TRIVITT MEMORIAL ANGLICAN CHURCH PHOTOS)

Farmworkers in Huron County are receiving extra support from a local church that is striving to make the lives of those working the region's fields easier. Trivitt Memorial Anglican Church, through the Huron Farmworkers Ministry, is providing items including clothing and life necessities as part of the church's outreach. From left are volunteers Phyllis Leighton, Jackie Rowe, Judy Finkbeiner Johnson and Bonnie LaFond, who were helping to pack gift bags for farmworkers. Gift bags included items such as lotion, body wash and soap.



Volunteers from Trivitt Memorial Anglican Church in Exeter also held a lunch for farmworkers competing in the first-ever South Huron IAW Cup at the South Huron Recreation Centre on July 19, coinciding with the FIFA World Cup final.



Elaine Knip and Beatrice Mash were serving food to the 150 farmworkers who participated in the South Huron IAW Cup on July 19, when Trivitt Memorial Anglican Church held a lunch for the competitors.



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