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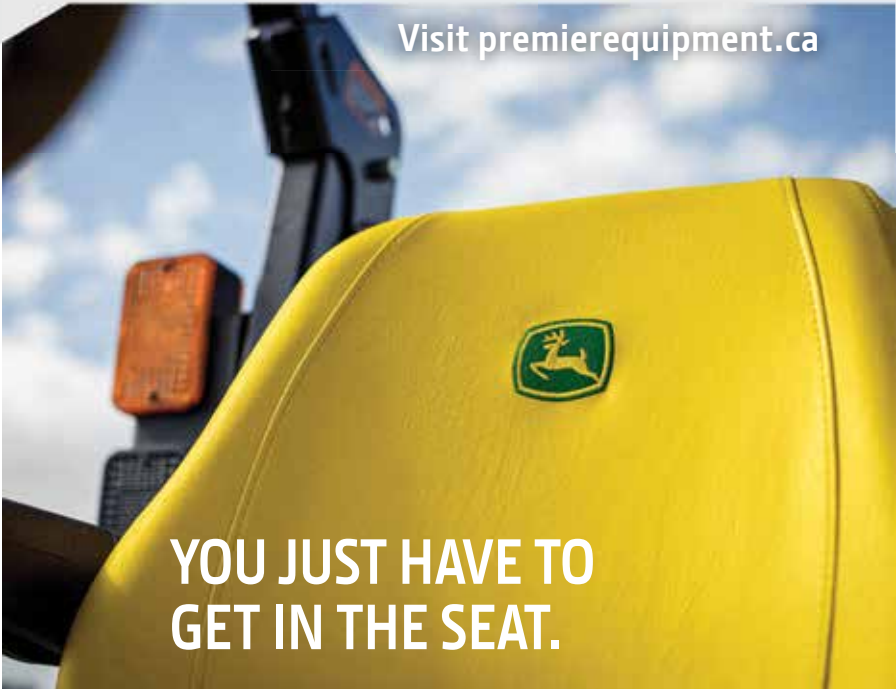
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“Science of Breeding Tomatoes” virtual field tour links students with space agriculture and an international tomato breeder



MacLellan with the finished commercial product at the HeinzSeed research facility



MacLellan prepared a video to demonstrate hand pollination of tomatoes as part of the virtual tour

By Diane Baltaz
International commercial tomato breeder Kelsie MacLellan of HeinzSeed, the agriculture and breeding unit of KraftHeinz in Leamington, not only develops tomato varieties for use around the world but also sends seeds into outer space. MacLellan, a Brantford native, recently shared her work at HeinzSeed with approximately 50 registered elementary and secondary school classrooms (almost 1,000 students) through a virtual field trip entitled “Science of Breeding Tomatoes”, organized by AgScape, Ontario’s non-profit agricultural education association. This virtual field trip was done in partnership with Let’s Talk Science, and was part of AgScape’s 2025 Canadian Agriculture Literacy Month (CALM) initiative, which takes place each

March, said engagement and communication specialist, Sheri Budhram. As a bonus, Let’s Talk Science of London sent participating classrooms tomato seeds that were grown and germinated in space through the “Tomatosphere Adventure” – a project which sends seed into outer space which are then sent to classrooms to use in science experiments. It was part of an educator resource pack that was distributed to educators across Ontario, said Budhram. Participating classrooms receive two free packages of tomato seeds: one of seeds sent into space; the other untreated “control” seeds. Students plant the seeds, then chart and compare growth differences, reporting results to the Tomatosphere.

Begun in 2001, the Tomatosphere Adventure is part of Let’s Talk Science – the non-profit agency which encourages science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) to youth from Kindergarten to Grade 12. The seed comparison experiment provides a hands-on mean of building scientific inquiry and investigative skills for participating students. “We thought it would be fun to work with Let’s Talk Science who have the Tomatosphere program as well as Kelsie from HeinzSeed, since the seeds that are sent into space are from Heinz,” said AgScape education coordinator Madison Lammers. “It’s true,” MacLellan confirmed after the virtual tour. “HeinzSeed partners with NASA on the Tomatosphere project. We supply them with seeds to take to the International Space Station.” MacLellan’s status as an international breeder intrigued the students. Born in Brantford, she became attracted to genetics while studying biology in high school. MacLellan studied population

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European Space Agency agricultural astronaut Thomas Pesquet with tomatoes in space

and quantitative genetics at the Universities of Guelph and Ottawa, spending summers working at the Ontario Crops Research Centre near Simcoe.

This geneticist began working for HeinzSeed in 2011 and is now responsible for international breeding, supervising and tracking the performance of potential new tomato varieties around the world. In fact, MacLellan began her virtual conversation by saying that she had just returned from examining field trials in Chile on the previous day.

During the dialogue, MacLellan answered multiple chat box questions from students and showed two videos of her greenhouse research that she created for the tour.

MacLellan said that she only breeds hybrid varieties that can be mechanically processed into products such as ketchup, BBQ sauce, diced and canned tomatoes. She selects varieties suitable to the varied growing conditions of the world's largest tomato-growing countries in the world, including Brazil, Chile, Spain, Portugal, Italy, and parts of North America, and conducts field trials in these locations each summer.

MacLellan creates 300 new tomato varieties annually; but she elaborated, "I narrow these down to one or two new varieties per year, after five years of selective breeding and evaluation. It's a long process to evaluate and replicate them in different countries and growing conditions."

HeinzSeed's tomatoes are developed through conventional plant breeding, not genetic modification, said MacLellan. One of her videos explained the parts of a female tomato flower and then demonstrated how MacLellan's team

use a vibrating pollination tool to replicate pollen moving from a male plant to a female in order to obtain a proper DNA profile. This genetic profile creates a new, high-yielding tomato with the necessary chemistry to be more resistant to pathogens and to reduce fungicide and pesticide use.

The students' questions centred upon the pollination process, the challenge of keeping the 300 test varieties separated, the versatility of specific commercial varieties, seeding times, and clarification about what constitutes a hybrid.

When asked about whether one must always hand pollinate hybrids, MacLellan replied, "Yes, all commercial varieties are hand-pollinated - even those that come in the 100,000 seed packages. We hand-pollinate each seed. It explains why tomatoes are expensive."

When a Humberview secondary school student asked, "How many times do you need to pollinate?", the international breeder replied, "Once per flower - either it's successful or it's not - we see that in a week or it turns black and fall off."

When another student asked what the largest tomato she developed was, MacLellan grinned and replied that she once created a 180-gram hybrid.

The Let's Talk Science portion used a video filmed at the International Space Station. In it, Thomas Pesquet of the European Space Agency, outlined tomatoes' potential for space agriculture for long-term missions before inviting student to join the Tomatosphere classroom investigations.

Pesquet said that he spent six months doing plant research in space at the time of taping. "We are already growing lettuce here at the space station, but no salad is complete without tomatoes."

The astronaut explained that "tomatoes can be a space super food" because they can be part of a plant-based system to enhance life support systems during space travel. They provide nourishment and water through transpiration from their leaves. The plants also convert light energy and carbon dioxide exhaled by astronauts into oxygen.

"This is where the Tomatosphere comes in," said Pesquet. "Will tomatoes grow the same in space as they do on earth? Help us find out."

The virtual tour ended with a question which asked MacLellan what is her favourite part of being a tomato breeder.

"My job is very cyclical," she replied, grinning again. "My job in February is very different from what I do in April or in August. I'm not doing the same thing every day."

MacLellan added, "Therefore I suggest that you think about pursuing an agricultural job and not just medical if you are interested in scientific research."

"It was great to work with both AgScape and Let's Talk Science," said MacLellan after the virtual field tour. "In general, I am very passionate about scientific education and love to participate whenever I can."

The virtual tomato breeding tour and AgScape's previous online events can be found on Youtube. 🍅

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coe-area artisan admits to a life-long love of fibre arts after starting her first knitting project at the age of eight. By 2014, she had been given some hand-spun yarn, followed by a spinning wheel and was hooked. She took four days of lessons with Wendy Bateman of the Haliburton School of Art and has continued working with natural fibres ever since. She joined the Norfolk Fibre Arts Guild in June 2014 and enthuses that there are many excellent people there.

"I just want to suck up the information from the others," she stated.

Weaving is another of her activities. Valoppi has two looms, a rigid heddle and a four-shaft floor loom which she purchased in 2021. She has learned this craft on her own, and produces scarves, shawls, tea towels, blankets, table linens and such. She works mostly with wool and alpaca.

In addition to spinning, knitting, weaving and other arts, Valoppi tends a dyer's garden where she grows coreopsis, wild bergamont, black-eyed Susans, goldenrod, black hollyhocks and madder. She explained that it is difficult to match colours in different batches as dye plants vary by year and soil types. It is also a longer process than commercial dyeing but there is satisfaction in making her own dyes.

Valoppi produces items for sale under the business name of The Tiny Woods and can be contacted at: thetinywoodsnorfolk@gmail.com

Spinning, Weaving or Fibre Art Guilds

Grand River Weavers and Spinners Guild, established in 1987, has about 34 members who meet the second Tuesday of each month year round at the Centennial Hall in York. Their mission statement is to "Promote and educate" and new members are always welcome to come and learn. New people can use wheels or looms the club owns as they learn the craft and can use the reference library the club has collected. Members are eager to share knowledge and attend a number of events to demonstrate their work, often having items for sale. Plans this year include Ancaster Fair and the Celtic Festival at Ruthven in September.

The Norfolk Fibre Arts Guild is composed of more than 20 members, who work in various fibre arts including spinning, weaving, wet or



Eager alpacas reach for a treat offered by Taryn Poot.

needle felting, rug hooking, knitting and crocheting.

President Janet Taylor describes them as a, "Wonderful group of highly-skilled people who are welcoming and helpful to newcomers and people wanting to learn these arts."

The group meets every Wednesday through the spring/summer/fall months at the Backus Heritage Conservation Area near Port Rowan at the Historic Site's Weaving Shoppe, where reference material, looms and wheels are available for use. Through the months of July and August, members are available every weekend

at the park to demonstrate their work. Saturday July 26, is a special event featuring "Field to Fabric" as well as a "Field to Flour" event, giving visitors two events on one day. The guild will demonstrate all the steps of taking a raw fleece through washing and carding on to spinning, weaving or felting a finished article. They will also be demonstrating their skills during the War of 1812 Re-enactment at Backus the weekend following Labour Day.

For more information contact Julia Wever at 519-875-2541 or Janet Taylor at 519-586-9070.



Shawna Valoppi shows some examples of her weaving art.

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Fund-raising breakfast supports local man’s bid for world plowing title



Mark Vaarkamp takes his hobby of plowing to the international level.

Part of the crowd enjoying a fund raising breakfast at Kohler.

By Alice Guthrie

The community turned out in force to support local plowing champion on March 1st a fund raising breakfast supported by the Haldimand and Oneida Plowmen’s Association at Kohler Agricultural Centre.

Hagersville area plowman Mark Vaarkamp will represent Canada on Sept. 4 and 5 at the World Plowing competition in the Czech Republic.

Mark started plowing as a fun hobby back in 1995 and participated at the “definitely muddy” Fields of Friendship International Plowing Match (IPM) at Selkirk in 1996. That was his first big match; undeterred by the insane mud of that

match he has been plowing ever since. He is coached by Tommy Hunter and other neighbours.

Local matches are held where competitors earn points towards the IPM. Points earned there go towards the Canadian matches and plowmen there compete for the right to represent Canada at the World competition. Mark won the gold last year at the Canadian match at Wolfe Island, a small island in Lake Ontario near Kingston.

Mark will compete in the Conventional class, using a plow already in Europe owned by the Canadian Plowing Organization. He may rent a tractor there or take his own tractor. Mark’s

coach Steve Speller will be going along this fall to help Mark adjust to an unfamiliar plow and soil type.

The hall at Kohler was busy with over 300 people attending the breakfast put on by the Haldimand and Oneida Plowmen’s Association. Most attendees were local, but Speller commented that folks from Cambridge, Strathroy and other districts were in attendance to support our Canadian competitor.

For more information contact Mark at: mark@vaarkampmanure.ca Other links: the Canadian Plowing Organization website www.canadianplowing.com or World Plowing Organization website www.worldploughing.org



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Farm Credit Canada launches new Trade Disruption Customer Support Program

By Tamara Botting
While farmers are champions at adapting to shifting situations, the nebulous messaging coming from the White House as to whether or not the United States will be imposing tariffs on Canadian goods (and on which goods, and when) has made for a particularly hazy future on the horizon, which makes planning for it an extra challenge.

To try and help farmers meet that challenge head on, Farm Credit Canada (FCC) has launched a new Trade Disruption Customer Support Program, which will provide \$1 billion in new lending.

According to information provided by Éva Larouche, senior consultant in media relations for FCC, the initial focus for this funding is on “assisting the industry in addressing cash flow challenges so that businesses can adjust to a new operating environment.”

The FCC is a commercial Crown corporation; as such, it is “a stable partner that reinvests profits back into the industry and communities it serves.”

The organization is “100 per cent invested in Canadian agriculture and food, providing flexible financing and capital solutions, while creating value through data, knowledge, relationships and expertise,” and it offers financial and non-financial products and services “designed to

support the complex and evolving needs of the industry.”

Through the Trade Disruption Customer Support Program, FCC is providing financial relief for viable customers and non-customers who meet the necessary lending criteria.

“This includes access to an additional credit line up to \$500,000 and new term loans. Current FCC customers have the option to defer principal payments for up to 12 months on existing loans.”

Because the situation remains in flux, “FCC continues to evaluate the economic impact of tariffs on the Canadian agriculture and food sector to ensure that FCC is best able to support the industry.”

This isn’t the first time in recent history that the FCC has worked to support Canadian farmers through an unusual challenge, though as Krishen Rangasamy, FCC manager of economics noted, “This trade disruption is different from what we saw during COVID.”

In 2020 and 2021, there was a global inflation spike due to supply chains being affected by COVID-related restrictions, which hampered production worldwide, he said.

“This time the trade shock originates from the US, meaning you’re unlikely to see a shortage of goods and the related inflation spike,” Rangasamy said.

Another difference between the two situations is that “There were generous government programs and highly stimulative monetary policy by central bankers around the world during COVID that helped support demand and lift inflation worldwide. This time, monetary policy is likely to be more conservative, especially considering the 2022-23 inflation shock is still fresh in the minds of central bankers.”

That said, if the US tariffs are broadened and the trade shock is worsened, there could be impacts on the Canadian economy, though perhaps not as significantly as was seen during the pandemic.

Rangasamy said it’s likely Canada’s gross domestic product (GDP) growth will be trimmed, and the unemployment rate will rise; it’s also likely that Canadian inflation will rise, due to retaliatory tariffs.

The Bank of Canada provides some scenarios that support these premises that can be viewed here: bankofcanada.ca/publications/mpr/mpr-2025-01-29/in-focus-1/

For more information about the Trade Disruption Customer Support Program, customers and non-customers can contact their local FCC office, or call 1-800-387-3232 to discuss their individual situations and available options. More information is also available online at fcc.ca.



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Ontario Farmers can access free mental health counseling through the Farmer Wellness Initiative

By Diane Baltaz

Accessing help for mental health problems remains a challenge across many Canadian sectors. But four free programs offered by Agriculture Wellness Ontario (AWO) provide an edge for Ontario farm families and workers.

AWO communications officer Michelle deNijs and Erica Sayles, an outreach coordinator, outlined a suite of confidential programs for farmers at a recent Ontario Hazelnut Association (OHA) workshop held in Grimsby.

Two of the programs are the Farmer Wellness Initiative and Guardian Network, both of which have operated successfully since 2022.

Guardians are trained community peers who recognize farmers who are struggling with their mental health and constructively discuss their struggles and connect them with appropriate, farmer-oriented resources.

The Farmer Wellness Initiative provides unlimited free access to tailored mental health counseling through a 24-7 phone line for Ontario farmers, farm workers and their family members. Services include crisis and ongoing counseling support in English, French and Spanish. Counseling is usually done via telephone or virtually, but can be done in person under some circumstances.

Counseling is geared towards the specific challenges experienced by the agricultural community, said Sayles and deNijs. Participating mental health counselors are “ag-informed” and available for unlimited sessions.

The third outreach is called In the Know and is coordinated by Sayles, who grew up on a Brant County dairy farm. This four-hour workshop trains participants on stress, depression, substance use and how to start conversations on mental well-being within a farm context.

The fourth offering is currently targeted for international agricultural workers in Brant-Haldimand-Norfolk and Windsor.

The AWO duo generated animated discussion amongst the Hazelnut Association participants when they mentioned that Farmer Wellness Initiative users can be matched with a new counselor for a “better fit” if requested. Also, youth between the ages of 12 to 15 years may use the service with parental consent.

deNijs cited statistics from a 2021 University of Guelph study on farmers’ mental health highlighted the AWO’s need for advocacy. The research involved nearly 1200 Canadian farmers who participated in an online survey on mental health.



Agriculture Wellness Ontario communications officer Michelle deNijs

The Guelph survey results revealed increased levels of anxiety, depression, emotional exhaustion, and cynicism among farmers compared to the Canadian public, particularly among farming women.

The results indicated that 68 percent of farmers reported being more susceptible to physical and emotional stress and mental illness. Another 76 percent said they were experiencing moderate or high-perceived stress, on the Perceived Stress Scale. They also scored higher on a burnout inventory compared to other Canadians.

The research also indicated that one out of four farmers stated that they felt that “life was not worth living”. Suicidal ideation was twice as high in farmers compared to the general population. Additionally, one of four farmers surveyed reported their life was not worth living, wished they were dead or had thought of taking their own life during the past 12 months.

Still, 40 percent of farmers felt uneasy about seeking help, said deNijs.

The In the Know workshops are designed specifically for farmers and the agricultural community, said Sayles. Mental health professionals from the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) run these sessions, using real-life examples from agriculture to cover topics such as stress, depression, anxiety, substance use, and how to start a conversation around mental well-being.

The Hazelnut Association’s workshop follows a government announce-



AWO “In the Know” outreach coordinator Erica Sayles

ment in late January about giving nearly \$10 million in federal and provincial funding to the CMHA and the AWO to enhance the Farmer Wellness Initiative and Guardian Network to the end of 2027.

Funding for these initiatives primarily comes from the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership (Sustainable CAP).

According to its website, the Sustainable CAP is “a five-year (2023-2028), \$3.5-billion investment by federal, provincial and territorial governments to strengthen the competitiveness, innovation and resiliency of Canada’s agriculture, agri-food and agri-based products sector.”

Services are available 24 hours daily through TELUS Health by dialing 1-866-267-6255, said Sayles.

“Still, 40 percent of farmers felt uneasy about seeking help, said deNijs.”

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Farmerettes forgotten no more: Documentary shines light on long forgotten program

By Luke Edwards

Some arrived out of a sense of duty, and some out of a sense of adventure. Some wanted to help the cause while others simply wanted to get out of class.

But arrive they did, from every corner of Ontario and even as far as Quebec. For a decade beginning in 1941, young women hopped on their bikes or found other ways to get to farms in southwestern Ontario. Their job was to fill the work boots of the young men who were in Europe fighting Hitler and the Nazis in the Second World War.

Farmerettes, as they would come to be known, were as young as 16 - some who fudged their birth certificates, even younger - and played a vital role in the war effort to defeat fascism and end a devastating global war.

And now, those women are being remembered in a documentary created by Colin Field, Bonnie Sitter, and a small team of supporters.

"It was so long ago and it was completely forgotten," said Field, the filmmaker who teamed up with Sitter to create the 50-minute documentary *We Lend a Hand*.

"Everybody can contribute. You don't have to be Winston Churchill. Service comes in so many ways."

We Lend a Hand tells the story of the women who participated in the Farmerette program, which ran from 1941 to 1952 and saw mostly teenaged girls spending a summer on the farm where they picked fruit and vegetables and helped get the crops off the fields. Much of that food was then sent overseas to help feed the soldiers who were on the front lines.

"It's women's history, it's war history, it's food history. And people have never stopped to think that before they fired the bullets and dropped the bombs that it all starts with food. And the girls stepped up and did that," said Sitter, whose interest in Farmerettes began a few years ago when she came across a rather nondescript photo, two inches by two and a half inches.



Cathryne Horn and June (Curts) Partridge were former Farmerettes who were featured in the documentary *We Lend a Hand*. They were among the supporters who received a private viewing of the film in Grimsby last month.

It had no names, and the only clue was a short inscription on the back that read "Farmerettes, about 1946."

That photo set her off on a journey to learn more about this largely forgotten piece of Canadian history.

"To be quite honest I felt a little indignant that no one had ever taught me about Farmerettes," Sitter said.

In time she would uncover troves of information, largely with the help of Shirleyan English, who was a Farmerette in 1952. Later in life she did some outreach and received loads of letters from fellow former Farmerettes, but then sat on them, at least until Sitter turned up.

That all culminated in *Onion Skins and Peach Fuzz: Memories of Farmerettes*, a self-published book that details the history of the program.

Then came the second chance meeting. Field at the time was learning to play the banjo and was at the Goderich Celtic Roots Festival at the behest of some friends to perform. He'd been staying at their home and wanted to get them a thank-you card.

He came across a vendor table selling cards, and met Sitter. They chatted for a bit and Field learned about the Farmerette program and some of the work Sitter was doing researching it.



A small team of filmmakers helped Colin Field and Bonnie Sitter create *We Lend a Hand*, a documentary on the history of the Farmerettes.



What started as a project featuring 10 former Farmerettes quickly ballooned, with Field and his team ultimately interviewing 20, with plans to keep going as they develop a website to go alongside the documentary.



Lou Schenck, whose family farm hired many Farmerettes during the Second World War, spoke with Sitter for the documentary.



The filmmakers ultimately hired a few actors to add some re-enactments of Farmerette life.

A few years later, as Field was venturing into his new hobby of filmmaking, he was once again on the search for some cards. When he reconnected with Sitter he asked about her research project.

Sitter, who will talk to anyone about Farmerettes for as long as they're willing to listen, gave Field the update.

"As she's describing it, in my head I'm thinking that this would make a beautiful documentary," he said.

It turns out, Sitter was thinking the same thing, telling Field what she really wanted was to see the story put on film.

So they set to work developing it. Originally it was to include interviews with 10 former Farmerettes, but that soon doubled to 20.

They then realized archival footage would be necessary, even if it can be expensive. Some amateur actors were hired to re-enact life as a Farmerette.

"If we do it, I want to do it right," said Field.

Last month they offered a private showing at the Grimsby Museum, inviting supporters and a few Farmerettes to see the nearly-finished product. Throughout the showing there were a few laughs as the women - now in their 80s and 90s - recalled the familiar teenage desire to get away from their parents, or the local farmer boy who caught their eyes and convinced them to return for a second, third or fourth year.

But there were also touching moments. Many of the young women had never been away from home for so long, while others didn't realize what went into farming and struggled. And as they shared their stories, the film provides regular reminders of what's going on in Europe and how fraught things were at the time. Field also called it a rite of passage time for the women where they bonded and learned the importance of teamwork.

As the credits - which include photo tributes to several Farmerettes - rolled, and the lights came on, there were more than a few puffy eyes.

"You see what an impact they had on Canada and the war effort," said Field.

June (Curts) Partridge was at the showing, and her experience with the Farmerettes is a reminder of just how tough the job was.

"I enjoyed it, but then I got sunstroke," she recalled. The medical emergency cut her time as a Farmerette short.

"A lot of people don't understand what people did (during the Second World War) so I'm glad they're making this public."

Jean Brett was also at the viewing. She was a Farmerette in St. Catharines in 1941, and remembered the challenging conditions.

"We had tents to sleep in," she said.

Like the others, Brett was happy to see the documentary created.

"Oh yes, it was very nice and interesting," she said.

Field has entered the documentary into some festivals, including Toronto's Hot Docs. Rules around some of those entries restrict public viewings. He admitted it'll be

tough to get We Lend a Hand into the extremely competitive Toronto festival, but remains hopeful they'll get some publicity there or in other, smaller film festivals.

However, once those restrictions are lifted, Field and Sitter plan to offer public viewings of the documentary. They'll also offer up copies to places like the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa or Juno Beach Centre in France.

The team received limited funding for the documentary, and costs escalated as they decided to grow the scope of the film. Sitter's collecting funds to help offset some of those costs. There's a GoFundMe page online titled "We Lend a Hand - Farmerette documentary film." Sitter will also accept e-transfers at bonnie.sitter@gmail.com, where she can also be reached to answer questions. Families of Farmerettes can also have them included in the documentary, as Sitter will offer to include a photo and description in the credits for a \$500 donation.

They also have a website, welendahand.ca, that they plan to build out with more interviews material and other information that couldn't be included in the documentary. 🌱

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The “Buy Canadian” movement moderately boosts existing local farmers’ markets growth

By Diane Baltaz

The recent tariffs imposed by the United States and threats to absorb Canada as the “51 state” has united Canadians to “Buy Canadian.” However, whether or not customers are pulling out their chequebooks to support local farmers’ markets depends upon whom you talk to.

Vendors at the Simcoe and Brantford Farmers’ Markets, the district’s two year-round sales venues, report seeing more visitors, but say it hasn’t always resulted in increased sale.

“There are certain vendors here who definitely have increased sales, but mine remain normal,” said Natalie Hahn of Kent Creek Farms, a fruit vendor at the Simcoe market for 10 years. “I’m hoping that it (Buy Canadian) will create increased sales.”

“There’s a lot of new faces and people who haven’t been there for a long time,” Hahn added.

Michelle Verhegge runs the Jensen Cheese stand at the Simcoe market: She noticed “a

bit of an uptick of people walking through” the market. “There are more seniors and new faces now. A lot of people are saying that this is their first time to market. Some mention to me about buying Canadian, although we carry a few other items from the UK and other places.

Jensen Cheese ran a “Reverse Tariff Sale” at its retail outlets including the Brantford and Simcoe Farmers’ Markets for three weeks in April. Labeling themselves as being: “Proudly Canadian”, they discounted select aged cheddars and Colby cheeses by 25 per cent.

“There’s a lot of new faces and people who haven’t been there for a long time.”



The Tillsonburg Farmer’s Market, which takes place on Bridge Street in front of the Station Arts Centre, is a busy place on Saturday mornings. One of many local farmer’s markets, farmers and organizers are waiting for harvest to start to see if there is an increase in business with the Buy Canadian movement.

“We are just helping everybody out as it’s tough right now as prices are going up,” explained Jensen sales manager Patty Davenport.

At the Brantford Farmers’ Market, Kimmy Osmond said that sales of her micro-winery’s Blue Gables haskap wine “have improved somewhat, but it’s not over the top.” Osmond

added that some locals who buy directly from her Paris-area winery express surprise when she says that she has a stall at the market. “They ask, ‘Where’s the Brantford Farmers’ Market?’ even though they lived in the city for 10 years.”

The heads of the farmers’ committee for the Simcoe Market and the Tillsonburg Farmers’ Market frame their observations of market trends as part of larger, historical and cultural movements.

Steve Miedema of Townsend Butchers chairs the Simcoe Farmers’ Market committee. Although he also sees new faces and return customers, Miedema said that market sales have steadily risen since the pandemic, which shut down retailers in 2020. Many vendors, including himself, switched to online sales with curbside pickup and “did well.” Since then, customers who value buying fresh, local product and supporting the local economy have returned.

“There is a strong rebound that’s been happening with the Simcoe Farmers’ Market for several years,” said Miedema. “There was a very visible comeback last spring.”

Miedema credits government initiatives such as Foodland Ontario and Norfolk’s promotion for being “Ontario’s Garden” for enhancing this rebound.

Ti m Norris of Orange Door Farm, Mt. Elgin, chairs the Tillsonburg Farmers’ Market, which runs on Saturday mornings from

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mid-June to late October. He has been selling artisan chicken at Tillsonburg for nearly a decade and added a stall at the Simcoe Farmers' Market four years ago.

"Perhaps customers come for a Canadian product, but I never asked," said Norris, "To me it looks more like window shopping with people wandering around seeing what is at the market, but they're not always spending money."

Norris recognizes that farmers' markets provide both social and economic benefit for communities across the generations and cultures.

"Farmers' markets were always a huge part of the community, just like churches. They're meeting places for a community."

Norris describes markets as places for socializing, especially for seniors who may consider their market shopping as a weekly highlight. "Going to farmers' markets gives them the outing that they crave. They meet people at market that they know but may be an acquaintance, but still someone to talk with."

Tillsonburg's recent growth as a retirement town boosted market patronage because "it's one of the first places newcomers visit when they move to a new town," said Norris

"They get the feel of the town that way. I find that a lot of them

come from the GTA (Greater Toronto Area)," said Norris. "If they're willing to spend money that is great for the town as it supports businesses. They want that idea of coming from a big place especially like Toronto and interacting directly with the farmer."

Such farmer -customer interactions work well at Tillsonburg, because market requirements forbids "jobbers" who bulk purchase from middle parties, other than buying additional items directly from neighbouring farmers.

"I sell the chicken; another farmer sells the beef," said Norris. "When you're talking to the people there, you're talking to the farmers. Supplements like limes are allowed, but the majority of what you sell comes from your farm."

Norris expects that Tillsonburg Farmers' Market sales to become year round with the plans to build a new market space. A developer specializing in multi-use commercial and residential spaces is currently negotiating plans that will include the farmers market with council.

Other local farmers' markets exist in Hagersville, Port Dover, Port Rowan, and Six Nations. These are seasonal and usually operate from late spring until October and are listed on community economic and tourism websites. 🌿



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A shot of haskap vinegar a day to keep the doctor away?

By Jeff Tribe

In some quarters, a shot of vinegar rather than an apple a day is reputed to keep the doctor away.

“It is a thing,” Plaid Shirt Farms’ Patricia Van Diepen agreed. “I’ve heard of it,” she continued, glancing down at a bottle of her newly unveiled Haskap Vinegar.

Her life and business partner Warren Strong was ahead of this curve, being dared to drink malt vinegar in his youth by friends at a fish and chip shop.

“That’s just boys being stupid,” he smiled.

But as Van Diepen said, vinegar shots are ‘a thing’, whether a wee dram of apple cider vinegar’s purported health benefits, or high-end versions one can belly up to at craft vinegar bars.

“This wouldn’t be so bad,” she mused, considering the bottle again. “The flavour is there, it’s beautiful.”

Three key words are embedded in the Plaid Shirt Farms approach: market and value-add.

“As in marketing, marketing, marketing, and value-add, value-add, value-add,” Strong interjected with a smile.

You can add an unofficial fourth, namely ‘innovation’, as in the desire to constantly explore new options, avenues to celebrate the unique flavour and properties of the farm’s haskap berries and black currants.

“People’s tastes change so we have to add in different things,” Van Diepen explained. “Expand our market, diversify our offering.”

The couple realized a dream in 2017 with the purchase of a former tobacco farm east of Otterville, essentially a blank canvas awaiting agricultural inspiration. Its limited acreage dictated some form of niche crop, haskaps moving to the fore. With origins in Japan, northern Europe and Canada, they are an antioxidant-rich crop loaded with vitamins C and A, fibre and minerals.

“They’re good for you and they taste great,” said Van Diepen, of a ‘sweet-tart’ flavour profile often described as a mixture of blueberries, raspberries and black currants. Thriving in cold climates, they resemble elongated, oblong blueberries and can be eaten raw, in baked goods or processed into jams, sauces, desserts, smoothies, wine - or vinegar. Haskaps were first planted at Plaid Shirt Farms in the fall of 2018, just now coming to full, mature production.

“It’s a long process,” said Van Diepen.

The ‘niche’ nature of haskap berries gave the couple space in a unique market, but it also meant as pioneers, there was less data and area experience to rely on.

“We figured it out by the seat of our pants,” admitted Van Diepen, of an at-times, challenging process.

They added black currants and currently have roughly ten acres of each, along with red currants and rhubarb. Both for pollination and to spread out the harvest, Plaid Shirt Farms sourced (from Canada) eight varieties of haskaps and seven of black currants, along with two red current variations.

Plaid Shirt Farms employs integrated pest management including biological control, habitat manipulation and targetted interventions to limit pesticide usage, drip irrigation to lower



Plaid Shirt Farms Patricia Van Diepen shows off elements of the farm’s line of value-added products, including, top right on the display, the recently-unveiled Haskap Vinegar. Although some may consider taking a shot in its natural form, it is intended as a flavourful vinagrette base.

water consumption, performs soil and plant tissue analysis to stay ahead of problems, and also encourages pollination through planting dwarf white clover between the rows, adding a 10-acre plot of bee-friendly cover cropping to further support the process.

Nets are installed over the haskaps in early May post-flowering to prevent avian predation. Harvest begins roughly mid-June and typically runs to the end of the month. Black currants take over at that point, lasting through the month of July.

They sell fresh berries during harvest and frozen product year-round through an on-farm market. They also ‘value add’ through an expanding range of products.

The original ‘Plaid Shirt’ line of haskap and currant-based jams and jellies has grown to include sparking beverages and bulk juice, 20-litre boxed containers supplying breweries and distilleries. To date, Plaid Shirt Farms juice has been used by Meuse Brewing near Waterford in fruited beers, by the Elora Distilling Company to create a black currant cassis (liqueur) and also by a third company producing a canned haskap seltzer.

Like many farmers, their dream includes the reality producing products is but the first step toward effectively capitalizing assets.

“The growing is the easier part,” said Van Diepen, in comparison to the crucial adding of value through marketing and innovation.

“You have to force yourself to do it,” said Strong. “Hey - go out and drive the tractor, who wouldn’t?”

Beyond their website (plaidshirtfarms.com) and Facebook page, they know knocking on doors to garner new retail partners, as well as the ‘joy’ of rising at 4 a.m. for long Thursdays and Saturdays at the St. Jacob’s Farmers Market, returning home around 5:30 p.m., as well as attending the Masonville market beginning in May. Van Diepen also works off-farm, a combination of food safety audits for Canada GAP and the International Sustainability and Carbon Certification program, which opens doors for Canadian companies to ship to Europe.

“Some days it’s challenging,” she admitted. “But we are committed to it, enjoy it and are determined to see it through.”

Haskap Vinegar began as an experiment three years ago, essentially a self-imposed challenge to see if it could be done. Not only was Van Diepen successful, she discovered a flavour profile which others might enjoy as well.

“It really is quite nice.”

Anyone is welcome to take a shot, however it was intended moreso as a vinagrette base, a recipe printed on the left side of the label.

“Instead of a balsamic salad dressing, you make this,” Van Diepen smiled.

And in a world where not only marketing and value-add are constants, this will not be the end of the line.

“Black currant vinegar is in the works as well,” Van Diepen concluded. 🍃

“They’re good for you and they taste great,” said Van Diepen



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Scott Sowden loves driving his horses

Evergreen Hill Farm horses a staple at Norfolk-area community events

By Tamara Botting

In Scott Sowden's opinion, when it comes to loving horses, "You're born with it. It's not something that people learn; I think it's in your blood."

That's certainly been the case for him.

Sowden had his first team of horses when he was 16 years old, "and I've had horses ever since."

Currently, he has a team of six Belgians.

"They're my breed of choice. They're docile ... very much creatures of habit; the more you use them, the better they are at it."

The horses spread their own manure, cut and rake the hay, etc. on Evergreen Hill Farm, which Sowden owns and operates with his brother Richard Sowden and son Kyle Sowden. They grow corn, soybeans, wheat and hay; they also raise around 34,000 broiler chickens.

The family has been farming in Norfolk County since 1864; the original farm was in Simcoe, where Holy Trinity Catholic High School is now.

Sowden said his love of horses is something he shares with both his grandfather and great-grandfather, who were impressive horsemen in their own

rights. While his father was more interested in tractors, Sowden has found his passion with his horses, and especially driving them with wagons and sleighs.

His wife Julie Sowden said, "He does it because he loves his horses, and he loves hooking them up. It doesn't matter if it's Christmas day or Easter Sunday or Christmas Eve; he'll hook up his horses if someone wants a ride."



Scott Sowden, with the help of his family, offers a variety of horse drawn services from his Port Dover based Evergreen Hill Farm

Sowden said the winter rush with driving the horses usually starts off with the ChristmasFest parade in Port Dover in mid-November.

"We've done that ever since it started. After that, we're pretty much in a little town or village somewhere every week until New Year's or after."

He's done Simcoe Christmas Panorama for at least 25 years, and has also done the Calithumpian Parade in Port Dover on Canada Day for a long time.

It's not just big community events; Sowden said around the holidays, "We usually get a lot of the same people who come every year," for personal sleighrides. They'll travel in from Hamilton, Burlington, Toronto, etc. He even had a

person from New York State inquire about his services, because they wanted to come to Port Dover.

There's a heated party room beside the horse barn where people can gather; each sleigh ride takes about an hour.

When it's the right time of year, guests can do a sugar bush ride, because the farm does bucket collection, rather than hoses, for the sap.

"They can go back in the woods and look at a pail and see how it used to be done," Sowden said.

Sowden and the horses have also been hired for a number of special events, like weddings and funerals.

Julie said after he was hired to do a couple of funerals, "Scott decided to build his own hearse."

One of the most memorable funerals Sowden was ever hired to do was a few years ago in Windsor in February. A man from a funeral home called him and asked him if he could drive.

"He'd been looking all over for a horse drawn hearse, and he said, 'I found several of them, but they're only in museums.'"

At first, Scott declined, because he wasn't sure what the roads would be like to travel such a distance with the horses. The man asked him what it would take for him to do it.

"I just gave him a ridiculous price, and he said, 'Be here by 11,'" Sowden said, adding that when he got there, the roads were blocked off, and there were television cameras.

"I don't know who the person was, but they must have been pretty important."

Sowden said whether he's going to show his horses at a fair, or he's driving them at a community event, he's grateful that his family, especially his kids – Kyle, Greg, Krista and Samantha – will come and help him.

“They can go back in the woods and look at a pail and see how it used to be done,” Sowden said.

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“It’s a lot of work,” he said.

It’s not just about loading the horses in and out, hitching them up, etc. A big part of the job is crowd control around the horses. While Sowden’s horses are gentle and extremely well-trained, they’re still 2,000-pound animals with a mind of their own, and that fact needs to be respected – something the general public doesn’t always comprehend.

“People are so removed from horses and animals and farming,” Sowden said.

Safety is always foremost in Sowden’s mind. That’s why this past winter was “the lousiest year for sleigh runs,” Sowden said. “You would think with the amount of snow we had, it would have been good, but we had too much ice.”

For the past few winters, “the ice is gone in two days,” but this year, “it just stayed and stayed.”

Since the horses weren’t sharp shod to go on the ice, Sowden couldn’t take the risk.

“You can’t take a chance on horses falling, or people falling,” he said, because with the horse drawn operation, safety is “the biggest and most important thing.”

Sowden said there are plenty of people who would like to do what he does, but not all of them can get the insurance.

“To do what I do, you’ve got to have the right horses, and you’ve got to be confident in what they’ll do,” he said, adding, “You’ve got to know what you’re doing, do it properly, and have lots of help.”

His daughter Samantha Stokes “does a lot of the driving; most of it,” he said. She and her husband have a farm next door, with some Percheron horses.

It’s in her blood, too.



“I have always had an interest in horses and have loved driving them since I was young,” she said. “To me, it’s not work because it’s something I thoroughly enjoy. It’s something my dad and I enjoy doing together and he’s taught me so much over the years. I’m so thankful to have been able to grow up around horses.”

When asked if his succession plan for the horses is that Sam will take over that part of his legacy, Sowden said, “I hope so, someday.”

If you would like more information about Evergreen Hill Farm’s horse drawn service options, visit the farm’s website at evergreenhillfarm.ca, or visit the farm’s Facebook page. 🌱



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Temporary foreign worker programs ‘a win for everyone’ says new F.A.R.M.S. president

By Jeff Tribe

Temporary foreign worker programs are absolutely imperative to Canadian agriculture and food security says incoming Foreign Agriculture Resource Management Service (F.A.R.M.S.) President Robert Shuh.

However, they are also crucial to the individuals employed through them along with their home nations.

“The whole temporary foreign worker program is an absolutely outstanding form of international economic development,” said Shuh, ‘excited’ to combine his passion for agriculture and economic development in his new position. “It’s a huge, huge economic driver in the source countries, and what’s really cool is it doesn’t cost the taxpayer. In fact, seasonal agricultural workers actually pay taxes to the Canadian government.

“It’s a win for everyone.”

Shuh brings both agricultural and governance experience to the head of the F.A.R.M.S. table. An apple producer first learning on a century farm his grandfather Clarence purchased in 1918, Robert’s connection to the fruit reaches back to a small 30-tree orchard planted in the 1920s.



Elmira-area apple producer Robert Shuh brings a combined passion for agriculture and economic development to his new position as president of F.A.R.M.S., along with extensive board experience.

Shuh was quick to erase childhood memories with a backhoe and dozer when he had the chance, however after a detour through dairy, turkeys, chickens, cash cropping and a two-year stint on an international development project in Nicaragua, he found himself contemplating ‘what’s next’ in 2011. Unable to dismiss a fellow hockey parent’s suggestion to consider apples out of hand, subsequent discussions with Kevin Martin of Martin’s Family Fruit Farm and Chris Hedges from Norfolk County and much consideration led to

planting 50 acres of high-density honey crisp, gala and ambrosia trees on his 50-acre farm near Elmira that spring.

“If grandpa is able to be watching, he’s having a good chuckle,” Shuh laughed.

In that first year, he and wife Lisa sourced family and friends of family for labour.

“In a year you are planting, you can make that work. In a year you are harvesting, that’s not a viable strategy.”

Shuh turned to the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program, his first introduction to ‘the outstanding people’ employed through it reinforced through years of association. Shuh Orchards has had plenty of local hires, however area workers tend to want either permanent full-time or regular part-time employment.

“The list of people who want seasonal full-time work is extremely short.”

Harvest is an intense period, every day weather permitting, finishing suddenly. As harvest is drawing to a close it’s not unusual to see locals working their phones during breaks, looking for their next job. If that next job requires starting immediately to lock in another six months of work, “Of course they’re going to go,” said Shuh.

Apple and other fruit and vegetable farmers operate within an extremely narrow window to hit peak quality consumers have come to expect, provided says Shuh through the ‘imperative’ dependability of people within temporary foreign worker programs.

His international economic development experience includes nine years with Menonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) Canada, seven as president. MEDA is an organization with 70 years of creating sustainable, scalable, measurable and replicable solutions to poverty in over 70 countries. Shuh has also been president of MeCredito since 2013, a financial network providing micro-financing empowering families and small businesses in Central America.

At home, Shuh joined the Ontario Apple Growers Board, assigned as that entity’s representative to F.A.R.M.S. a year ago.

“And I was asked to become president at this year’s AGM.”

Philosophically, based on previous board experience, Shuh brings appreciation for the value of relationship to the position. In his first couple of months, he has been working ‘hand-in-hand’ with Vice-President Andy Vergeer meeting leaders of agricultural and governmental organizations.

“Building the relationship so when we do have significant requests for them or difficult discussions, the relationship is established.

“You can have good candid conversations as opposed to a bridges-burned relationship,” Shuh added. “Nothing good comes from that. Even if we don’t agree on every issue it’s always better to be talking.”

Secondly, attention is focussed on the tumultuous nature of Canada/U.S. relations since the ascension of a president with radically-different points of views from Shuh’s.

“I think he is an epic fail by every metric we have.”

“In that first year, he and wife Lisa sourced family and friends of family for labour”



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Food security has always been a huge issue says Shuh.

“But it has become front of mind for Canadians since the ‘Orange Man’ took power. He can not be trusted.”

Shuh sees the current understanding of the preferability to ‘shop Canadian’ as a great thing, leading ultimately to ‘more orchards, more onions, more fields of carrots.’

“And if so, the demand for more foreign workers will also increase.”

Thirdly, Shuh identified six ‘white’ or discussion papers from Employment Services Development Canada which may help shape the future of temporary foreign worker programs as an item squarely on the F.A.R.M.S. radar. The papers seem to be open-ended and designed to promote discussion says Shuh, increased worker mobility being one item of note.

“I understand, but it’s our job to put some guard rails on that,” he said.

Shuh expressed concern that unfettered mobility ‘is not an option’ because it could present similar challenges farmers face with local employees, notably the risk of moving on before completing their original mandate. Increased mobility must include fulfilling the rights and obligations of original contracts, said Shuh.

“There will be a lot more come out in the months ahead,” he continued of a period of comparative calm during the federal election campaign, expected to ramp up following its conclusion. His own learning curve has admittedly been steep through the first couple of months as president, however Shuh is finding his feet, confident in helping F.A.R.M.S. meet the mixed challenges and opportunities ahead.

“We’re in good shape,” he concluded. “We are going to continue to take care of the labour needs of all the farmers and growers who rely on us.” 🌱



Greenhouse vegetables are one of many crops that depend on the FARMS program for labour. Robert Shuh recently started as president of the program.



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Ontario produce growers talk tariffs

'No one wins a trade war'

By Tamara Botting

On Jan. 20, 2025 – the first day of his second term as President of the United States – Donald Trump announced that he would be imposing an additional 25 per cent tariff on goods imported from Canada and Mexico to the U.S. as of Feb. 1. The tariffs were then paused for a month, implemented for a few days, then largely removed, and are now possibly going to be back on on April 2.

This article was written on March 31, and the information contained in it was up to date as of that time; however, the nebulous nature of this situation means that things could have changed again after publication.

And that's exactly the problem.

As Shawn Brenn, chair of the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association (OFVGA), noted, "The mere uncertainty and instability caused by the threat of tariffs is causing real harm and struggles for many of our farms. ... We have seen orders for Canadian produce being cancelled, wholesale prices of produce being depressed, and farms unable to move ahead with important decisions like hiring or investments into new equipment or expansion of their farm."

It's a similar story for members of the Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers (OGVG), said executive director Richard Lee.

"The proposed tariffs have had a detrimental impact on Ontario greenhouse vegetable producers," he said.

In the 72 hours in early March when the tariffs were broadly applied against all Canadian exports into the U.S., "our members paid over \$6 million in tariffs," Lee said. "This money will not be recovered and in many instances resulted in the grower and marketers absorbing the losses."

This was because purchase orders for the week had already been issued.

The OGVG has engaged a trade lawyer to provide members with some direction as they try to navigate this turbulent situation that is full of unknowns.

"The tariffs were implemented rapidly with little to no guidance," Lee said.

Beyond that, "The threats of tariffs have created significant uncertainties for all our members that are looking to invest or expand operations while maintaining relationships with existing customers."

All of the uncertainty could in turn significantly impact farm jobs in Canada, Brenn said, since "farms reliant on export markets may decide to slow down production, leading to the displacement of employees."

Over 85 per cent – approximately 200 truckloads a day – of Ontario's greenhouse vegetables, as well as a significant proportion of other crops, such as field and processing vegetables, are exported to the U.S. annually.

It's a vital trade partnership, not only because of how large it is, but also because there aren't many alternatives.

As Brenn noted, "The high perishability of fresh produce also limits efforts to diversify into new markets, such as Asia, as the distance to other markets and the resulting transport time is just too great."

Lee pointed out that while in the short term, "there is no viable option for the U.S. to displace the produce we or Mexico supply in a timely manner," it's a different scenario long-term.

"If tariffs continue, the increased costs will be felt by the U.S. consumer ... further jeopardizing food affordability, healthier eating habits and inflationary pressures."

All of this would likely result in "decreased demand in the future" for Ontario-grown produce, Lee said.

The possible U.S. consumer demand gap isn't one that can be filled by the Canadian market either, Brenn said.

"We as Canadians can't simply eat our way out of this tariff situation."

That might not be the only challenge on the horizon, Brenn said; "The possibility of Mexico – who is also facing tariff threats from the U.S. – shipping excess product to Canada, further

disrupting Canada's local market, (is) also of significant concern."

Lee said his organization, along with industry allies including Fruit and Vegetable Growers of Canada (FVGC), Canadian Produce Marketing Association (CPMA), Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA), and the International Fresh Produce Association (IFPA), has been advocating for supports for farmers across Canada at both the federal and provincial levels, in the absence of a resolution to the trade war with the U.S.

"Tariffs will only further jeopardize domestic food security for all countries involved and further aggravate the affordability crisis so many have been struggling to manage," he said.

While U.S. consumers pay the tariffs their country implements, Canadians might soon feel a similar pinch in their wallets. In response to Trump's threat of more tariffs being put in place on April 2, Canada's new Prime Minister Mark Carney has indicated that he would employ retaliatory tariffs.

Brenn said these must be applied very mindfully, "or they can have a potentially detrimental impact on our domestic food production. For example, when counter tariffs are applied to imported inputs from the U.S. that are needed to grow our crops, such as packaging, equipment, machinery parts, seed, fertilizer, chemicals, etc., this can cause our domestic production costs to escalate, potentially leading to higher grocery prices."

Along with the uncertainty of what will come out of the U.S. next is the question of how Canada will respond, as the federal election is taking place on April 28.

While those results weren't known before print deadline, the Ontario election already took place earlier this year, meaning that the local MPPs are in position and ready to advocate for their constituents at the provincial level.

Progressive Conservative MPP for Brantford-Brant Will Bouma noted that "The tariffs imposed by President Trump are jeopardizing a decades-long trade relationship that generates \$45 billion in agri-food trade every year."

He added that the Ontario government is committed to protecting the province's agri-food sector and its 871,000 workers.

"We want to cultivate the conditions for our sector's long-term resilience and global competitiveness," Bouma said.

He noted that in January, the Ontario government had increased the Risk Management Program from \$150 million to \$250 million, and that the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness is in regular communication with its federal counterparts, "and will continue to work hand in hand with them to make sure Ontario farmers have the support they need."

Independent MPP for Haldimand-Norfolk Bobbi Ann Brady said she wants to see the Ontario government focus on cutting red tape and taxes.

"We can only control what happens on this side of the border; now is the time for decisive action," Brady said, adding that she'd like to see some interprovincial trade barriers removed, and more effort put into establishing different international trade partners.

"We must be able to become more self-reliant and less reliant on trade with the Unit-



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ed States, if they continue to be an unpredictable trading partner,” she said.

While government officials are looking at other options for trade partners, there is arguably some value in trying to salvage what was in place, if it can be done for the benefit of all parties.

Brenn said the OFVGA “strongly supports free trade between Canada and the U.S.

“We believe that using food in trade disputes benefits neither farmers nor consumers and for this reason we urge government to work toward a place where there are no tariffs on food products. Imposing tariffs on fresh produce would raise consumer prices and reduce access to healthy food across North America.”

As Lee noted, the simple fact is, “No one wins a trade war.”

TARIFF TIMELINE

United States President Donald Trump has imposed, paused and threatened tariffs on goods coming into his country from Canada and other nations multiple times since taking office in January 2025. Here’s a timeline for the Canadian-specific incidents:

- On Jan. 20, Trump announced that on Feb. 1, there would be an additional 25 per cent tariff on goods imported from Canada and Mexico to the US.
- On Feb. 1, Trump signed the executive order to impose the

tariffs on almost all goods from Canada and Mexico, and a 10 per cent tariff on China.

- Two days later, on Feb. 3, Trump agreed to a 30-day pause on the tariffs on Canada and Mexico, while also threatening new tariffs against the European Union.
- On March 4, the tariffs against Canada, Mexico and China went into effect; then-Prime Minister Justin Trudeau put a 25 per cent tariff on \$155 billion of American goods.
- The next day – following an outcry from U.S. automakers – Trump announced a pause on tariffs on cars coming into the U.S. from Canada and Mexico for one month.
- On March 6, Trump suspended many of the tariffs that he had placed on products from Canada and Mexico.
- On March 10, Ontario announced its own tariffs, which included a 25 per cent surcharge on the electricity it exports to Michigan, Minnesota and New York. In response, on March 11, Trump threatened to double the tariffs on Canadian steel and aluminium imports; eventually, both sides backed down.
- The U.S. announced more tariffs to come into effect on April 2, which Canada’s new Prime Minister Mark Carney said would be met with retaliatory tariffs. 🌱



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‘More jokers in the weather deck’: Climate change means more uncertainty for farmers

By Luke Edwards

It’s a stark reminder of just how precarious a farmer’s livelihood can be.

“The difference between prosperity and bankruptcy can sometimes be five millimetres of rain or 0.5 degrees of heat,” said Environment Canada’s David Phillips, as he presented a talk called “Tomorrow’s Forecast: Warmer, Wetter, and Wilder – Are you Ready?” He did so at February’s Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Convention in Niagara Falls.

Phillips said there was a time when farmers thought issues with the weather and climate would in the near future no longer exist for farmers. There was also a time when many people thought climate change wasn’t real. But with the scientific community largely in agreement, and with farmers and citizens alike experiencing first hand more dramatic weather events, Phillips said he doesn’t believe that’s the case anymore.

“The majority of farmers recognize that something seems to be amiss,” he said, adding that while the climate is always changing, human activity in the last few cen-



Environment Canada’s David Phillips told farmers and those in attendance at February’s Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Convention to expect warmer, wetter and wilder weather in the coming years.

turies means it’s changing faster and more drastically than ever.

“There are more jokers in the weather deck. I don’t know what’s normal anymore.”

And while short term weather forecasts remain notoriously difficult to nail down with any precision, Phillips warned of three overall trends in the coming years,

harkening back to the title of his talk.

“Warmer, wetter, wilder. That’s what the forecast is going to be,” he said.

However, it’s not all doom and gloom, with Phillip calling the future of agriculture in Canada anything but bleak. It just means adapting with the times.

“We’ve got to change faster than the climate is changing,” he said, adding Canada will likely be one of the five super producers of food.


“There’s great reason to be optimistic of the future of agriculture in the province.”

Still, he warned of being prepared.

“There’s going to be winners and there’s going to be losers. Everyone is going to be affected,” he said.

And to be best prepared, farmers and society should support scientific advances and innovations. Farmers may need to rethink their approaches, not relying on the traditional calendar dates to determine what they’re doing. 🌱

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Canadian explorer speaks at NFA annual meeting

By Jeff Helsdon

A best-selling Canadian author gave attendees at the Norfolk Federation of Agriculture's annual meeting insight into what it's like to be a modern-day explorer. Along the way, he had the crowd mesmerized at times and laughing at others.

Adam Shoalts is the author of five award-winning, best-selling books on his adventures as a modern-day explorer and insight into Canadian history. He entered the literary scene with his 2016 book "Alone Against the North," which depicted his adventures canoeing rivers in northern Ontario and Quebec's James Bay frontier that he surmised may have waters never before explored. After writing "A History of Canada in 10 Maps", Shoalts accomplished what no one had done before, paddling across the Arctic from the Yukon to Hudson's Bay. Leaving in the spring as the ice was breaking up, he endured challenges that couldn't be imagined as he completed the 4,000-kilometre journey – much of it paddling against the current. A touch of Norfolk County appeared in "Where the Falcon Flies" where he followed the journey of a peregrine falcon from Long Point to the Ungava peninsula tundra in northeastern Quebec.

Shoalts told the crowd he grew up in rural Ontario and wanted to live like Robinson Crusoe when he was little.

"Every chance I had, I was out in the woods," he said.

While that may be the dream of many young boys, Shoalts turned it into reality, spending months alone in the wilderness, battling wildlife, going over waterfalls in his canoe, and not seeing another human for months and thousands of kilometers.

"Whatever Mother Nature throws your way, you have to find a silver lining," he said.

Sometimes, that was a challenge, particularly when he could hardly see through clouds of mosquitoes and black flies.

"The Hudson Bay Lowlands, come July, have the highest concentrations of blood-sucking insects," he said.

Shoalts is also the Royal Canadian Geographical Society Westaway Explorer in Residence.



Canada's modern-day explorer Adam Shoalts shared stories of his adventures in the remote reaches of the country at the NFA's annual meeting. His latest book tells the tale of following a peregrine falcon he saw outside his home at the time in St. Williams to the wilds of the Ungava Peninsula in Quebec.

With his wife Alexandria from Woodstock, he was looking for a place to settle and lived in St. Williams for a few years. From the country's northernmost reaches to its southernmost limits, Shoalts longed for the north but found consolation in the high number of birds and that he was only a 10-minute portage from Long Point Bay. Then, seeing a peregrine falcon flying across the road by his home triggered another journey.

"I thought there is a part of the Arctic right here in Norfolk County," he said.

Research told him the birds nest in the remote reaches of the Canadian Arctic in the Ungava Peninsula. He thought the best way to explore this connection was to follow the falcon from Norfolk to its nesting grounds in the Arctic.

"It was a study in contrasts," he said of the 3,400-kilometre journey.

He started battling a snowstorm and waves on Lake Erie, portaged around Niagara Falls and then faced the challenge of dodging ocean freighters in the St. Lawrence Seaway near Montreal. Turning north from the St. Lawrence past Quebec City, the journey quickly metamorphosized to complete wilderness.

"By the time I got to the end, I was haggard; I was half famished," he said.

Shoalts gave a preview of his next book, which will launch this fall, about the work of an Arctic explorer. Saying time is also frozen in the cold of the Arctic, he added, "A hundred years later, you come back, and the ashes of a fire are still there. You drop a pocketknife, and 200 years later, it's still there."

Asked what's next, Shoalts said more of the Arctic.

"I dream up adventures in strange ways so it's hard to predict," he said. 🌱

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Norfolk Federation of Agriculture launches web site

By Jeff Helsdon

Norfolk Federation of Agriculture’s executive is hoping its new web site will provide a local gateway for residents to learn about agriculture, and assist in communication with a younger generation.

Although NFA has had an Internet presence for years with information available through the Ontario Federation of Agriculture site, there weren’t a lot of details on local events for members and local residents.

The finished site has information about the NFA, the OFA, who the NFA executive is, information on the NFA scholarship, how to apply for NFA sponsorship of an event and an event listing.

NFA’s education committee came up with the idea of launching a new web site. Secretary Rinske Peeters and co-vice-president Jennifer Schooley were tasked with developing the site.

“It’s been a year and a bit in the making,” Schooley said.

“It’s been a slow journey to success,” Peeters added.

The first task they had was to find a person to develop the web site. They felt more comfortable dealing with someone local, and wanted a person who “understood the nuances of agriculture” and also could work at their pace. They found a web designer who is the daughter of a tobacco farmer.

Content for the web site had to be taken to the executive for approval in steps. Then, if for instance something was changed a couple of days after the executive meeting, it had to wait for the next meeting. In between, both ladies had busy seasons on their farm and Peeters became a mother.

“Getting everybody on board - people were tentative,” Schooley said of the lengthy process. “No one has ever created a web site before. Sometimes farmers tend to be conservative.”

“The bigger concern is this stuff we wanted,” Peeters said.

The goal was to include the OFA material, but also have local content. With Norfolk’s crops being so diverse, there was a lot to capture.

One of the goals was to increase outreach to a younger, more Internet-savvy generation.

“One of the driving forces behind all this is to appeal to the younger generation,” Schooley said.



Norfolk Federation of Agriculture recently launched its own web site, with information on the federation, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, local events and meetings.

“We wanted to be digitally present since our only footprint was on the OFA web site. It wasn’t fitting for us,” Peeters said.

“It wasn’t working and wasn’t reaching the younger generation,” Schooley added.

One of the features of the site is the ability to apply for the NFA’s annual scholarship for high school students through the web site. Another is to add events to the calendar for better promotion for members.

Communication to members previously was exclusively through e-mails sent out by the OFA. However, in some cases, the e-mail could go to one person in a farming family and not get passed on to the younger generation. The hope is as awareness of the web site grows, it will ensure all members of farm families will be aware of NFA and OFA events.

There is also an educational component to the web site for the community at large.

“There is an opportunity to educate Norfolk County about agriculture issues,” Schooley said. “Part of what is lacking here in Norfolk County is the educational component with the non-farming person who lives in Norfolk County.”

She elaborated this could include education on what agriculture is, opportunities to visit

farms, and information about the crops growing in the county’s fields.

Interestingly, Schooley and Peeters came into the web project with little experience in it. Schooley had worked on a web page for her own business and Peeters did a high school project designing a web site. They caught on quickly, and worked towards its completion.

Logo contest

One thing that came up during the redesign process was the need for a new logo.

“It came from our web design lady and she asked if we had considered updates to the logo because the colours were harsh,” Peeters said.

“In the future if we want to have swag, hats, shirts, it would be good to have an updated logo,” Schooley said.

After Schooley brought forward some ideas for a logo and opinions were divided, the concept of a logo design contest was born.

The deadline for submitting designs is June 1. Logos in either jpeg or png format can be submitted through the web site or to nfasecretary1936@gmail.com. The winner will receive a \$100 gift certificate to a business local to them. NFA’s board of directors will judge the contest.



Feds provide \$1.6M for farm safety programs

Dollars were committed during Canadian Agricultural Safety Week last month

By Niagara Farms Staff

In one of his last acts in politics, Lawrence MacAulay announced funding for farm safety programs in Canada.

The retiring Minister of Agriculture and Agri-food made the announcement - up to \$1.6 million over three years - during Canadian Agricultural Safety Week last month. The funding will be spread out over three years and fund a range of initiatives, including national leadership and training programs, awareness campaigns and on-farm resources.

“Our hardworking farmers do so much for us, from putting food on our tables to keeping our economy strong. This funding will help ensure they are safe and taking care of their own health – both mental and physical – so they can continue doing the vitally important work they do. By supporting farmers and their families, we’re helping to build stronger, safer agricultural sector for everyone,” MacAulay said in a press release.

The release pointed out one program in particular that will develop safety education resources designed for children, to keep the youngest people on the farm safe.

Other programs will support mental health work.

“CASA is deeply grateful for the continued support from AAFC. This vital funding allows us to work towards our vision of a safe and sustainable agriculture where healthy Canadian farm communities thrive,” said CASA executive director Sandy Miller.



The federal government announced funding to support farm safety programs last month.

“With this generous contribution, CASA can continue to offer impactful programs, including Canadian Agricultural Safety Week, BeGrain-Safe, and Canadian Agricultural Injury Reporting—programs that make a positive difference in the lives of farmers, their families, farm workers and farming communities. Together, we are building a safer agricultural sector for generations to come.”

Ag Safety week takes place each spring on the third week of March, seeking to remind

those in the farming community the importance of safety.

From 2011 to 2020 there were 624 agriculture-related fatalities in Canada an average of 62 per year. However, those numbers have been dropping, from an average of 110 deaths per year between 1990 and 2005, and 70 deaths per year between 2006 and 2020.

The funding comes through the AgriCompetitiveness Program, which is under the Sustainable Agricultural Partnership. 🌱

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Proper country of origin labels more important than ever, says CFIA

By Luke Edwards

The Canadian Food and Inspection Agency is reminding businesses the importance of properly labeling where their product comes from.

In a notice to industry members last month, the CFIA said the Canadian government is “working with provinces, territories, and industry associations to promote clear, transparent and accurate product labelling.” The notice went on to encourage businesses to help consumers discern products that have Canadian input.

“We have seen an increase in complaints related to origin claims on food labels or in advertisements, including some related to ‘Product of Canada’ and ‘Made in Canada,’” the notice said. This is presumably a response to the increased desire to buy Canadian following U.S. President Donald Trump’s trade war and threats of annexation.

While use of the “Product of Canada” or “Made in Canada” claims are voluntary, those who use those terms are subject to federal guidelines, which apply to food sold at all levels of trade as well as for claims made in advertising and by restaurants.

All ingredients and components that contribute to the food must be considered, the guidelines say.

The “Product of Canada” claim is suitable when “all or virtually all major ingredients, processing, and labour used to make the food product are Canadian.” Very low levels of products that aren’t typically made in Canada can be allowed.

Packaging isn’t considered in the “Product of Canada” claim, and neither is the use of imported farm inputs such as seeds and fertilizer.

Simply using “Canadian” is considered the same as “Product of Canada.” However, claims of being 100 per cent Canadian means everything must be Canadian and there’s no wiggle room.

The “Made in Canada” claim is appropriate for items where “the last substantial transformation of the product occurred in Canada, even if some ingredients are from other countries,” the guidelines say. These claims should include qualifying statements such as “made in Canada from domestic and imported ingredients.”

Other claims can be used, as long as they’re truthful and not misleading. The guidelines offer examples such as “roasted in Canada” for coffee products, which is obvious since all coffee beans are imported.

Some commodity specific guidelines are included. Meat producers can use “Product of Canada” claims for animals slaughtered in Canada.

“Animals are considered Canadian if they are born or hatched, raised and slaughtered in Canada or, in the case of feeder cattle, if they have spent a period of at least 60 days in Canada prior to slaughter in Canada,” the guidelines say.

“Meat from imported hatching eggs, including those hatched in transit, would

meet the ‘Product of Canada’ guidelines provided that the chick was raised, slaughtered and processed in Canada.

For dairy and eggs, “Product of Canada” claims can be applied if the egg was hatched in Canada or the animal milked in Canada.


“It is important to follow the CFIA’s guidance for their use and ensure the label is accurate and not misleading. Accurate ‘Made in Canada’ and ‘Product of Canada’ labelling fosters a fair marketplace and builds trust,” the CFIA notice said.

An online AskCFIA service is available for those with questions.


Making false or misleading claims about a food’s origin is against the law, and the CFIA notice said government officials will take enforcement action where appropriate.

The agency also had a message for those who come across labelling they suspect to be misleading or inaccurate.


“We take labelling issues seriously and we want to know about products that are labelled in a misleading manner. We encourage consumers and industry to report concerns directly to the CFIA through our food complaint or concern web page,” the notice said. 🌱




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Canadian Animal Blood Bank helps dogs

By Alice Guthrie

Imagine your beloved pet has suffered a life-threatening injury. People in such situations can be given donated blood to save their lives, but what about your furry friend?

The Canadian Animal Blood Bank (CABB) to the rescue.

Formed in 1996 in Manitoba by veterinarian Dr. Ken Mould, the organization's mission is to provide education about transfusion medicine (veterinary) and supply high-quality canine blood products. Originally the Manitoba Animal Blood Bank, it was renamed in 1998 as its services expanded nationwide. It is a not-for-profit entity, registered as a charity with CRA. The main focus is on dogs, but support and equipment for other species is available. Each donation can be life saving for up to three dogs in need.



For a dog to be acceptable as a donor, it must be between one (18 months for giant breeds) and eight years old and can continue to donate through its tenth year. The dog needs to be healthy, even-tempered and weigh a minimum of 55 pounds. It must be fully vac-

inated for core vaccines (DHPP and rabies) or have satisfactory titers for these. Dogs can donate every three months.

Donor clinics are held at various locations in several provinces, including Ontario. Blood is collected, processed and distributed across Canada to animals in need. As with humans, there is more than one blood type. The most needed is DEA 1 negative, considered the canine version of the universal blood type. It is unfortunate that blood supplies are often in shorter supply than demand due to advances in veterinary medicine.

Those who are interested can help through financial donations, volunteer help or by coming up with fund raising activities. Check out the website at: www.canadiananimalblood-bank.ca

So far there are not any clinics in Norfolk County that are hosting donation events. There are upcoming clinics in the area; these are at Dunnville Veterinary clinic on April 17 and Park Road Veterinary clinic (Brantford) on April 30.

One donor's story

Tara Carll of Fonthill has taken her dogs to donate twice in the Niagara area. She felt a bit nervous at first, as the blood is taken from the dog's neck, but found the procedure to be, "so easy." She stated that the dogs are taken to a quiet calm room and staff are gentle. The donation is quick, about five minutes with owner and staff calming the dog by talking to and holding it. Carll said that dogs often start to feel a bit funny after about three minutes. The donation is stopped if the dog becomes too stressed or uncomfortable. Dogs enjoy treats both before and after their donation, which helps to keep them happy.

Carll has three Golder Retrievers, Rhea, Aleigh, Charlie, all of whom have donated.

Carll got started following the suggestion of a friend and expects to continue.

"I think it's great to be able to give back to other dogs ... animals need blood too," she stated.

She encourages others to consider this worthy effort. 🍀



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Norfolk Federation of Agriculture’s new executive



Norfolk Federation of Agriculture’s executive for 2025 was recently installed. Left to right are: Jen Schooley, second vice-president; Tyler Townsend, president; Harry Inthout, first vice-president; (back row) Will Stone, MSR; Dave Campbell, treasurer; Ed VanDenElsen, director; Marsh Kostuk, director; Brian Wooley, director; Bill Townsend, director; and Rinske Peeters, secretary.



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NORFOLK COUNTY - ONTARIO'S GARDEN

SECTION B / ISSUE 33 / SPRING 2025

Norfolk and Brant 4-H clubs membership remains strong with additional activities

By Diane Baltaz

Area 4-H youth can expand their “hands-on learning” skill thank to the addition of new clubs in both the Brant and Norfolk 4-H

Norfolk 4-H added a Food Preservation Club, which teaches canning, jams and jelly making. It sprang from the association’s “Grow Your Own Vegetables Club”, said Norfolk 4-H president, Sharon Judd. Also, the Poultry Club obtained funding for incubators, meaning that participants can hatch eggs for their future show birds at home this year.

Brant’s 4-H spring-summer roster lists new arts, livestock and community clubs such as Seed Art, “Bird and Boots (bird watching-hiking), Farm Machinery (formerly the Tractor Club), Camping, Catering, First Responders (police, paramedics, fire fighters). The long-popular Bell Homestead club is expanding its community involvement by participating in Doors Open Brant in May and potentially the Homestead’s autumn fun fair and candlelight Christmas tour.

“There’s always something new!” said Brant 4-H media liaison coordinator Susan

Eddy. “Each year we offer different activities which keep things fresh and interesting such as our First Responders Club, Seed Art and Camping. Traditional clubs like beef also have a different focus each year so if participants take the same club for several years in a row they are having new experiences.”

While figures for total registration were not available at press time, both Judd and Eddy said that enrollment numbers remain strong. Cloverbuds – the pre-4-H program for chil

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Farm Dealership changes hands after being in family for 85 years

By Diane Baltaz

After 85 years of being in the family, cousins and business partners Rob and Guy Heaslip are handing over their landmark farm dealership to a new owner.

W.J. Heaslip Ltd., the John Deere dealership located north of Nelles Corners, has been sold to Premier Equipment, the multi-store John Deere outlet with locations across Southwestern Ontario. Rob Heaslip, president of W.J. Heaslip, said the transition to the new ownership began in mid-April.

The “W.J.” in the company name comes from the cousins’ grandfather, Wilfred Jerome, who owned a feed mill near Nelles Corners. In the 1940s, W.J., better known as “Dutch”, added farm equipment to his business starting with tractors from the former Oliver Company.

In 1967, Dutch built the existing facility on a five-acre tract on County Road 20, across the road from the family mill. Heaslip said that Dutch sold the mill – it is now Armstrong Feeds. W.J. Heaslip focused on agricultural equipment and machinery, notably from the White, Gehl, and Kubota companies.

Heaslip’s father, Lyle, and Guy’s father, Jim and their uncle, Bruce Heaslip took in the John Deere line in 1986.

“Dad and his brothers took on John Deere along with Kubota,” said Heaslip. “They also had one of the first Home Hardware dealerships – it was called Hollinger Hardware.”

“We were around (as youth) like in any small business. Guy and I were curious teenagers ... We never wanted to do anything else.”

The family eventually phased out Hollinger Hardware eventually to focus on agricultural



Cousins Rob (left) and Guy Heaslip were the third generation to operate W.J. Heaslip Ltd. on Haldimand Road 20.

equipment sales and repairs. Heaslip said he and his cousin grew up around the premises –

“We were around (as youth) like in any small business. Guy and I were curious teenagers ... We never wanted to do anything else,” he confessed.

They purchased the business from their fathers and uncle in the late 1990s.

“We are complementary,” said Heaslip. “Guy is the Ying and dealt with administration and

the paperwork. I’m the Yang dealing with the customers.”

The cousins retained the John Deere and Kubota lines.

“Both lines were very unique – they were competing with each other, but they both did well. Of course, John Deere is the bigger of the two with a bigger line of equipment.”

As agricultural equipment and many dealerships grew larger in size and farm populations decreased, the cousins added additional products, including lawn tractors and Honda push mowers, water pumps, Stihl battery tools, snow blowers and ATVs.

They sold off their Kubota line in March, 2023, and continued repairing and selling tractor parts and equipment.

In addition to the larger size of farm machinery, Heaslip professed his amazement of the complexity of today’s tractors compared to Dutch’s first Olivers: “There are self-driving tractors, and John Deere has links to customers’ tractors to know what’s going to break before it happens. It can monitor your RPMs (revolutions per minute) and when your oil filters needs changing.”

Most of the 26-person staff will remain when Premier Equipment completes the transition, said Heaslip. However, Guy hopes to “move onto other things in the area – he doesn’t accept the word, retirement.”

But a fourth generation of Heaslip has just come on stream at this Nelles Corner business: Heaslip’s son, Jaime, 27 recently joined the company payroll.

W.J. Heaslip Ltd. serves Haldimand, Norfolk and Brant Counties. It is situated between existing Premier dealerships in Norwich, Ayr and Smithville. 🍀

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Norfolk and Brant 4-H clubs membership remains strong with additional activities



Mark Eddy coaches a youth at the Brant 4-H Tractor Club (now called Farm Machinery Club) near Burford last year. The machinery tasks involve an obstacle course, a hay wagon back up station, skid steering operating and excavator operation stations.



Brant 4-H Community Involvement participants taking a break as historical interpreters at last year's Bell Homestead

dren aged six to eight –is at its full capacity of 26 in Norfolk, while Eddy said that Brant's Cloverbuds "have been steadily increasing."

The Brant Horse Club is full and the Farm Machinery and Sewing clubs have waiting lists.

Animal clubs, notably beef and dairy calf, remain strong in both counties. Norfolk continues to have a rabbit club, "Llama and Llama hiking" and dairy goats. Brant's Animal Friends trains youth on pet care and grooming their

chosen pet as well as entering the animal in the Paris Fair Pet Show.

Brant's Barn Dance remains popular, even attracting two "border hoppers" from adjoin-



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ing counties, said Sarah Monahan, who leads three clubs including this year’s dance.

“It shows that the Brant 4-H list is getting around,” she said.

Because the Barn Dance’s “achievement” – the members’ public exposition of their newly-learned skills -- involves inviting friends and relatives to a final party, Monahan believes that the event expands local interest in 4-H participation.

“4-H is so inclusive and wonderful,” said Judd, about 4-H’s popularity. “Its motto is learn by doing and our focus is to get the kids involved to actually do what they signed up to do, such as food preservation or archery, they actually do it – 4-H is actually very hands on.”

Waterford’s Joan Malcolm, who runs the Norfolk4-H Sewing Club, agrees. Malcolm and three other leaders run back-to-back beginner and advanced clubs alternately. In the first year, youth of both genders aged nine to 21 learn how to thread and use a sewing machine and construct tri-coloured pillowcases and a knapsack. In the advanced club, they create

pajama pants, creating their pattern, fitting and sizing.

“They love them when they’re done,” said Malcolm. She added that the students’ 4-H achievement involves creating a video of someone whom they visited to model their pants, explaining the purpose of 4-H to the person.

“These videos promote 4-H, gives public speaking experience and modern technology skills,” added Malcolm. “I love working with the kids. They’re good: they only sign up for the club if they’re interested – it’s not a classroom where half may not be interested – and they’re excited about what they made.”

Judd and Eddy stressed that the confidence youth gain doing their tasks carries into adulthood.

“We are the only youth organization I think that elects an executive,” said Judd. “The kids carry out parliamentary procedure. They elect a president who runs each meeting. The leaders ... teach the rules about making and discussing motions and voting. You’ll find that

a lot of people with leadership skills in community spaces do well because they had a 4-H background.”

“Being a part of the 4-H program offers youth many opportunities for leadership and personal growth such as being an executive member of their club (president, vice-president, secretary, cyber reporter), ...These opportunities and skills (public speaking, working with others, confidence, how to conduct a meeting, taking notes, communication skills, mentoring others etc.) can be applied in other aspects of the participant’s life and future endeavours,” said Eddy.

“You get value for your money,” concluded Eddy. “Our participants pay their \$110 registration fee-- which is way less than many sports and other activities -- and they are able to join as many clubs as they want! Some participants do several clubs; for example, my daughter does Birds and Boots, Spice of Life, Community Involvement - Bell Homestead, and Community Involvement - First Responders. That’s a lot of activity for \$110!”



A 4-H Sewing Club member sews the pajama bottoms she designed in February.



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Moore's Seeds relocates to Tillsonburg

By Jeff Helsdon
A century-old family seed business has found a new home just outside Tillsonburg in Norfolk County.

Moore's Seeds, which started in 1916 as Ralph Moore & Sons as a dairy and vegetable farm in Norwich, has relocated to Bell Mill Side Road on the outskirts of Tillsonburg. The company has built a reputation for producing quality bird seed.

VanMeer Farms is the new owner of Moore's Seeds. This company was started in 1983 by George and Willy Vermeersch with one farm west of Tillsonburg. The operation continued to grow and expand, eventually purchasing the Gilvesy property across from TRW and expanding the grain elevator operation on that property.

Ralph Moore & Sons was purchased by the Wilson family in 2009 and moved from Norwich to Otterville. The Vermeersch family became aware the operation was for sale.

"VanMeer Farms was looking for a way to diversify," said Andrea Thoonen, who operates the company with her father Greg Vermeersch and brother Colin Vermeersch.

They purchased the company last year and started construction on a new 36,000-square-foot facility adjacent to their elevator on Bell Mill Side Road. The name was also changed to Moore's Seeds.

"It fit nicely with what we were doing," Andrea said. "We were knowledgeable in growing grains and thought it would tie in."

"It fit into our wheelhouse of crops," Greg added.



VanMeer Farms is the new owner of Moore's Seeds. Originally based in Norwich, Moore's has been a family-operated company throughout its 100-plus year history and produces a variety of bird seeds. A new processing facility and retail showroom will be opening on Bell Mill Side Road.

The new facility will house a processing line to clean, mix and package bird seed. It will also feature a large retail showroom to sell bird-related supplies such as feeders and accessories. Twelve bins adjacent to the building will hold large quantities of the most popular seeds for mixing. The company came with a diverse mix of 200 different products. These range from caged bird mixtures to pigeon and outdoor

bird seed, plus accessories. Moore's Seeds products are sold across Canada in retailers ranging from small specialty shops to Wal-Mart. The products are also shipped internationally around the world.

VanMeer Farms has been growing millet since 2023 and planning is underway to inves-

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Canadian Cattle Association focused on advocating for members amidst U.S. tariff talk

‘The best possible outcome is no tariffs’

By Tamara Botting

When asked for his thoughts on the United States’ proposed tariffs on Canadian goods, Canadian Cattle Association President Tyler Fulton said that in his opinion, “The best possible outcome is no tariffs, and we hope that our free trade and integrated market will prevail.”

In general, the association’s role is to advocate on behalf of Canada’s 60,000 beef farms and feed lots.

“We work to address issues that concern Canada’s beef producers to support our vision of a dynamic, profitable Canadian beef industry,” Fulton said.

Arguably at the moment, the biggest issue of concern for the association’s members is the tariff talk coming from our southern neighbours.

That’s why when the U.S. tariffs were implemented on March 4, the association organized a virtual producer town hall for the following week as a way to share information and updates with members; nearly 300 producers and industry representatives were in attendance.

Not only that, but “Our representatives have accepted every invitation to participate in discussions about the Canada-U.S. trade relationship and to advocate on behalf of

Canadian cattle producers. We have sought out additional opportunities to ensure that Canadian beef producers have a voice in every conversation about the trade relationship and tariff discussions,” Fulton said.

The association gave the Government of Canada its recommendations on how to best address potential impacts of the tariffs on producers, and provide relief where possible. These include removing the caps on AgriStability, cost-shared Livestock Price Insurance, increased agri-marketing funding, and some targeted direct financial support.

“We also provided advice on potential countermeasures in the event tariffs are applied,” Fulton said.

While this activity has been more issue-specific, it’s all part of the association’s overall purpose: to advocate for Canada’s beef industry.

In 2015, the association launched its first National Beef Strategy; the third and most recent strategy (for 2025-30) was launched at the end of January.

“The strategy positions the Canadian beef industry for greater profitability, growth and being a high-quality beef product of choice in the world. Our industry is diverse and made of many parts,” Fulton said. “National and provincial beef industry groups have come together in a coordinated and unified response with our requests for support and our advocacy on behalf of producers.” 🍀

Moore’s Seeds relocates to Tillsonburg

tigate which other components of bird seed can be grown local.

“There’s lot of opportunities to grow as many different crops as we can,” Colin said.

For many years, spray millet heads were cut by hand with a pair of scissors. The Wilsons developed a single-row harvester. Greg said they are adept at manufacturing their own equipment and millet harvester 2.0 is under construction. One of the issues with cutting the heads was the stems were transported to the sorting line and then had to be disposed of. The new harvester will see the millet sorted in the field and the stems left in the fields. Harvested millet is then stored in either apple bins or bulk tobacco kiln bins until ready for processing.

Other kinds of millet are harvested with a grain head on the combine.

One emphasis that will be maintained is Moore’s reputation for good, clean seed. The company will be operating with the slogan “From seed to feed” as it promotes its lines. The Vermeersch’s are exploring the possibility of adding to the company’s product lines with the closing of Peavey Mart.

Greg said one of the goals is to create a destination people will travel to for purchasing seed and supplies. The company currently has seven employees, with hopes to add more.

The retail store opened in early April and a grand opening will follow. 🍀



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Ambassadors, leaders and members honoured by Agritourism Ontario

By Norfolk Farms Staff

Agritourism Ontario recently celebrated accomplishments of those in the industry with its annual awards night. Held at 13th Street Winery in St. Catharines, the association handed out three awards to deserving recipients. The awards were for work accomplished in 2024 and included categories of ambassador, leadership and member of the year.

“We are thrilled to recognize an outstanding team, business and individual this year. All three have made extraordinary contributions to the agritourism sector, each in their own unique ways,” said AO board chair, Darlene Downey.

Here are the three winners.

AMBASSADOR AWARD

Ontario’s Southwest Tourism Organization has worked on several agritourism projects over the recent years. In recognizing the organization - which covers Haldimand, Norfolk, Oxford, Middlesex, London, Elgin-St. Thomas, Sarnia-Lambton, Chatham-Kent, and Windsor-Essex - AO pointed out its Next Stop Taste series, content that features local agritourism, and their efforts to encourage people to visit local farms.

“They also do a lot of development and training for farmers in diversified agriculture,” a press release said.

The organization’s Ontario Southwest Signature Experience program also includes several agriculture related experiences.

LEADERSHIP AWARD

A private member’s bill put forward last year helped net MPP Matthew Rae the leadership award for 2024.

Rae, an MPP for Perth-Wellington, drafted the Growing Agritourism Act - Bill 186 last year. At the time he said his goal with the private member’s bill was to provide consistency and protection for farmers around liability.

“It will help remove some barriers to those investments that farm operators can make in their agritourism operations,” he said last spring.

It received royal assent in December.



The Southwest Regional Tourism Organization received the 2024 Ambassador Award from Agritourism Ontario. In the photo is AO board chair Darlene Downey with Southwest Regional Tourism Organization executive director Joanne Wolnik.

“This legislation is a first of its kind in Canada and a game-changer for agritourism operators. MPP Rae showed extraordinary leadership in drafting this bill and seeing it through to royal assent,” the AO press release said.

MEMBER OF THE YEAR AWARD

Described as a family and business that’s both “first class” on and off the farm, Meghan and John Snyder received the member of the year award.

Owners of Snyder’s Farm in Bright, they host thousands of visitors each year to make their way through the corn maze or pumpkin patch, climb up on a wagon for a hayride, enjoy a fun fright with the Halloween Haunt, or sit back and relax by a campfire with some home baked goods.

The family is also highly active in the community, supporting local charities and volunteering and helping out the local children’s hospital. 🍁



After his private member’s bill on agritourism received royal assent in December, Perth-Wellington MPP Matthew Rae received the Leadership Award from Agritourism Ontario. He’s pictured here with AO chair Darlene Downey.



Snyder’s Farm won the Member of the Year award from Agritourism Ontario for their work providing an ever evolving on-farm experience for visitors as well as their significant community work. In the photo is AO board member Amy Strom with John and Meghan Snyder.

Canadian-made strawberry-growing system launched

With locally-grown produce becoming a top priority, a new Canadian-made strawberry growing system is helping more growers meet the demand. The A.M.A. Strawberry Growing System is a professional-grade gutter system built for small-scale production. Developed in partnership between A.M.A. Horticulture Inc. and Growtec, it is a first-of-its-kind solution for growers looking to enter the strawberry market or extend their berry growing season by moving production from field to tunnel.

“Now more than ever, Canadians want local-grown strawberries year-round,” says Shawn Mallen, manager of hydroponics and berries at A.M.A. Horticulture. “Large Canadian greenhouse operations have risen to the challenge, growing berries in controlled environments and getting them onto grocery store shelves across the country. But until now, only large-scale production systems were available for growers, creating a barrier to entry.”

“We partnered with Growtec, a leading Canadian gutter system manufacturer, to create a scaled-down version of the same gutter system used in many 40-acre greenhouses,” Shawn explains. “Now, smaller growers can get started at their own pace and budget, using a proven system that’s customized for their unique needs.”

The A.M.A. Strawberry Growing System is a do-it-yourself, tabletop gutter system that comes complete with gutters, brackets, drainage, truss support and more. Available in 92” segments, growers can choose how big or small they want to start, and add as they go. The system is designed to spec, assembled by growers on site, and can be shipped across North America.



“We knew smaller producers were eager to enter the strawberry market, and we were eager to help. So when Shawn had the idea of partnering on a scaled-down version of our gutter system, we jumped at the chance,” says Brian Zimmermann, director of sales at Growtec. “We’ve worked with the A.M.A. team for a long time, supporting the North American strawberry market, and we’re excited to now help growers produce top quality berries no matter the size of their operation.”

Growtec and A.M.A. Horticulture are established leaders in North America’s berry market. For decades, A.M.A. has delivered quality containers, substrates and other solutions to push the boundaries of berry growing, with many innovations coming from partners in Europe, including BVB Substrates and Bato Plastics.

“We make a point of visiting Europe, and specifically the Netherlands, every year to learn

what they’re doing now, and what we could be doing better,” says Shawn, who has become a leading voice for strawberry substrates in North America, most recently presenting at the 2025 joint meeting of the North American Strawberry Growers Association and North American Raspberry and Blackberry Association in Hawaii.

“Our team lives by the philosophy of always learning, always growing. It’s how we deliver solutions that help our customers succeed, and this new strawberry system is a perfect example,” says Connie Bradt, managing director of A.M.A. Horticulture. “We are so proud to serve growers and help them innovate, improve their business, and deliver quality produce to consumers across this country.”

A.M.A. Horticulture Inc. is a solutions-focused wholesale supplier that has been serving the horticulture industry since 1982. 🍓

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Status quo for Ontario's farmers, as confidence drops

OFA survey uncovers a few surprises among some familiar themes

By Luke Edwards

With trade, tax and tariff concerns swirling, Ontario farmers generally held pat amid dropping confidence in the industry last year.

That's according to the results of a business confidence survey conducted by the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. This is the second year the organization has conducted the survey, and OFA senior policy analyst Ben LeFort said there have been some noticeable shifts in the past year.

"We see enough of a difference in the confidence and investment that tells us a story of a drop of (overall) confidence over the past 12 months," he said.

Responses from the 1,061 farmers across the province who filled out the survey in December saw a fairly sharp drop in the number of people who were "very confident" in the outlook of Ontario's farm sector in 2025. That number fell six points from 18 to 12 per cent. Those who answered "somewhat confident" also dropped slightly, while those who answered with "not so confident" or "not at all confident" rose about five and two percentage points, respectively.

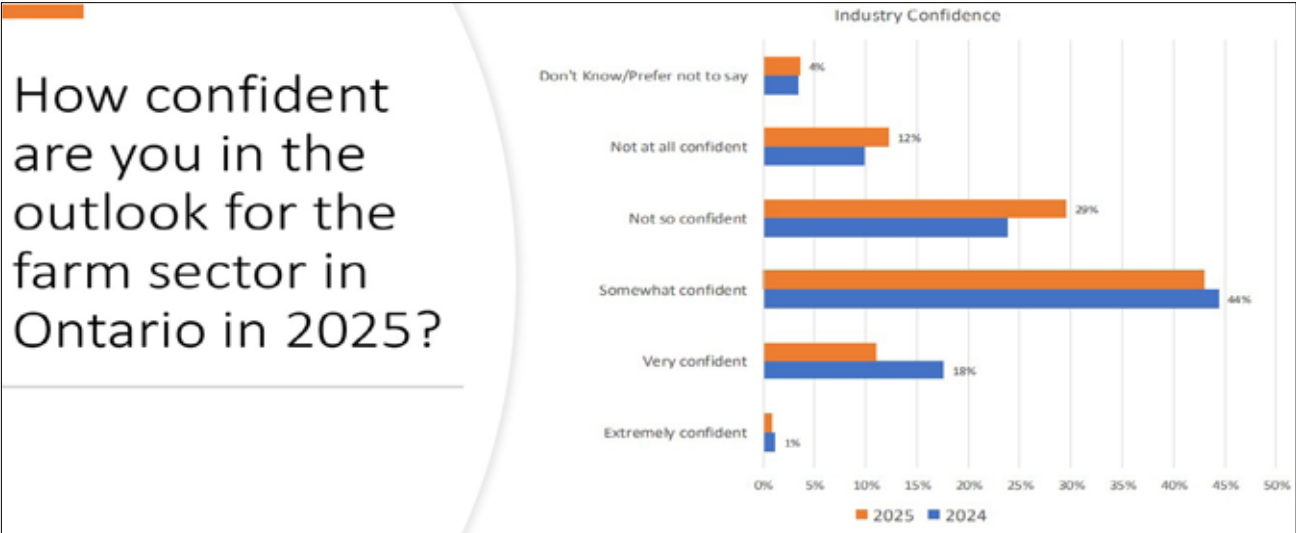
Similar trends held when farms were asked for their outlook for their own individual operation.

At the same time, more farmers reported staying the course last year than the previous. When asked to describe the growth of their farm in 2024, 74 per cent said it stayed the same, up from 68 per cent in 2023.

Meanwhile there were matching two-per cent decreases for those who reported expanding their business (17 per cent in 2023 to 15 per cent in 2024) and those who reported downsizing (11 per cent in 2023 to nine per cent in 2024). Those who reported diversifying also dropped two per cent, but that figure was already small, going from four to two per cent.

LeFort called it "a year of farmers staying pat, staying with the status quo."

A drop in confidence and investment wasn't terribly surprising, especially given the timing,



According to a survey conducted by the Ontario Federation of Agriculture in December, farmers in the province have less confidence in the outlook of their industry than they did at the same time in 2023.

as the survey ran just as the threat of American tariffs began ramping up.

"It's hard to feel extremely confident when you've just heard this news," he said, adding with the ongoing uncertainty, he expects this mood to continue throughout 2025. LeFort also expects they'll be adding more trade and tariff specific questions to the survey in year three.

Beyond getting a general sense of the mood among farmers, the survey also sought input on issues facing farmers. LeFort said this will help the organization prioritize its lobbying and advocacy efforts.

And on this front, there was a little more stability. Taxes and energy costs returned as the top two policy priorities farmers reported. Protecting the right of property access, a new option this year, took third spot, beating out encouraging Ontarians to buy local, which was last year's third highest ranked policy priority.

However, buy local was still the fourth highest, and given more recent news he suspects it remains a high priority for farmers.

One somewhat surprising figure on the tax front is that farmers identified rising property taxes as the biggest concern.

"The carbon tax certainly gets much more headlines...but property tax has been a growing concern for the past decade," LeFort said.

Looking ahead to 2025, farmers expect rising input costs to pose the biggest challenge to their business, a repeat of last year. In second spot, however, is rising insurance costs, which came as a bit of a surprise to LeFort.

"The cost of insurance rising to number two is definitely a red flag. It really highlights the importance of doing this survey for us," he said.

That is one of the overall goals of the project, LeFort said.

"We feel like we have a pretty good handle on what those issues are but we want to be able to quantify what are the top issues that our members want us working on," he said. And as they get more years of data it will become even more useful as they can track trends and see how things are changing or staying the same.

LeFort will continue doing deep dives into the data. He was happy to receive nearly 1,100 responses, up from around 800 the first year, and which included a wide variety of farm types from all corners of the province. One thing he and the OFA team will be pushing for going forward, though, is to get more young farmers providing responses. The most recent survey saw only four per cent of respondents in the 35 and younger category. Farmers tend to skew older, but even so, that's a number he wants to see increase.

Those younger people who did respond seem more optimistic.

In fact, LeFort said there's basically "a direct line between age and confidence."

Also interesting, was an increase in confidence among farmers in the north of the province. But it's not all sunshine and roses, as those farmers documented a distinct issue with a lack of protection for crop damage as a result of wildlife. LeFort said he wasn't surprised, as he's worked on this issue in the past.

As he continues to dig into the results, LeFort plans to offer up insights to local OFA chapters, with any unique findings at the local level.

He encourages farmers to check out the results and watch a webinar that was recorded on the survey. Both are available on the OFA website. He also encourages farmers to keep an eye out for the next survey, which will run again in December.

For the survey, there were 51 farmers in Niagara who responded, 28 from Haldimand, and nine from Hamilton-Wentworth. 🍁

Bobbi Ann Brady

MPP Haldimand-Norfolk



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Touch-A-Truck was about tractors too



Craig and Gary Chipps, from east of Courtland, sit in front of their 1956 International 300 Utility at the Norfolk Little People’s Daycare Touch-A-Truck fundraiser in Langton.



Langton’s Weston, Madison, Oaklynn and Cadence Holman sit in the cab of a Kubota M7-154 tractor Saturday at the third annual Norfolk Little People’s Daycare Touch-A-Truck fundraiser.



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Yeast or famine: locally isolated strain can feast on acetic acids

Research at CCOVI suggests *Saccharomyces uvarum* CN1 can help save juices from infected grapes



Debbie Inglis (second from the left) is the director at CCOVI and last month presented some findings that suggest a locally isolated yeast strain can help save grapes that have been affected by sour rot and Botrytis by consuming the excess acetic acid the diseases cause.

By Luke Edwards
A locally isolated yeast can drop acid...levels in grapes affected by sour rot and Botrytis. Debbie Inglis, director at the Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture Institute, presented some of the promising findings of research her team at Brock University has conducted on the yeast strain *Saccharomyces uvarum* CN1. Using the strain can help reduce increased acid levels that come about as a result of the infections, and potentially save grapes that otherwise may not make the cut. Her team had worked with the strain before, having isolated it years ago, but the question here asked “if there is a way we can improve the quality of grapes that are just at the rejection stage?” Inglis told those attending the Cider and Oenology session at the Ontario Fruit and

Vegetable Convention, held in Niagara Falls last month. Grapes that are infected by sour rot and Botrytis can see the levels of acetic acid rise, potentially beyond acceptable levels for wine makers. Inglis and her team found that CN1 can reduce those levels, consuming the acid. “At every single brix level we had lower levels of acetic acid,” she said, describing tests that compared the use of CN1 to traditionally used yeasts. However, questions remain. For instance, Inglis said they aren’t sure what is produced when the yeast feasts on acetic acid. “Clearly the yeast was consuming the acetic acid and converting it into something else,” she said.

“We’re still investigating what that byproduct is.” Inglis said they’ll also have to come up with some logistical solutions to make it more commercially viable, since the CN1 strain doesn’t dry as well as others. The bulk of the research involved red wines, though they’re now expanding into whites, including recent work on Riesling. And, at the end of the day, the consumer is the ultimate decider. “If it doesn’t taste and smell good in the glass, then it’s rather meaningless,” Inglis said. However, there’s another potential benefit, she said. CN1 produces less ethanol, which means it could be used to produce wines with lower alcohol content, which several in the industry are working towards as consumer preferences change. 🍷



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A quick count: Camera technology helps with key orchard decisions



The Blue Mountain Fruit Company is utilizing a tool from Vivid Machines to perform rapid fruit counts and measurements of the trees in their orchard. The technology uses high tech cameras and machine learning.

By Luke Edwards

It takes time to develop trust. That remains the case when it comes to robots. Gerbe Botden is the orchard manager for Blue Mountain Fruit Company, a Thornbury-based farm. He and Jenny Lemieux, of Vivid Machines, presented to an audience at the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Convention, held in March in Niagara Falls. Botden shared his experience using technology created by the company.

“What I wanted was something to measure and count the fruit of every single tree in our orchard,” Botden said.

The Vivid device uses camera and machine learning to do just that. The device can be mounted on different equipment, providing more information that can help Botden plan thinning decisions and arm his labourers with the most accurate instructions possible.

“We can then make bloom thinning decisions...and tell guys where to go and then a simple rule for them to follow,” Botden said.

It took time for the grower to fully trust the data he was receiving. Early on he would still conduct the full visual inspections he had previously. But as the information proved accurate, he began simply double checking and trusting the data more.

“I’m still going out into the field,” he said.

The Vivid Machines website boasts 90 per cent prediction accuracy, and the ability to scan 15,000 trees per hour at a moving speed of five to 10 miles per hour (eight to 16 kilometres per hour).

“Ease of use and making it accurate are really our focuses,” said Lemieux.

Botden said the technology is useful to him throughout the year. Not only does it help with thinning decisions, but it also helps him plan for yield and storage, as well as marketing preparation as he can get an idea of fruit size.

“We used the data at every single point of the growing season,” he said.

Lemieux said it can also be used for other related research, such as the correlation between soil compaction and fruit count.

The company is exploring using their technology with other crops, including pears, high density cherries and vineyards. 🍏



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Feds bump up AgriStability compensation rate following announcement of Chinese tariffs

By Norfolk Farms Staff

Tariffs from south of the border aren't the only international trade concern Canadians farmers must deal with these days, and the federal government has announced support for the sector follow another global power's move to raise tariffs.

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada announced new measures to help farmers affected by new tariffs imposed by China. That country placed a 100 per cent tariff on Canadian canola oil, canola meal and peas, as well as a 25 per cent tariff on certain pork, fish and seafood products.

Those supports include increasing the compensation rate of AgriStability to 90 per cent from the previous 80 per cent, as well as doubling the current payment cap to \$6 million for the 2025 program year. The AgriStability payment cap hasn't been updated in more than 20 years.

Additionally, the federal government is providing provincial and territorial counterparts flexibility that's meant to get money to producers faster.

"China's decision to apply these tariffs will have a devastating impact on our farm families and their communities. We're working hard to diversify our trading partnerships and establish new markets, but we know the sector needs support now," said Minister of Agriculture, Agri-Food and Rural Economic Development Kody Blois in a press release.



The federal government has made changes to its AgriStability payment policy in an effort to offset the impact of new Chinese tariffs on canola and other products.

"Today's announcement is a direct result of their advocacy – and our commitment to them. As Canada's Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Rural Economic Development, I will continue to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our producers and will defend the sector every step of the way."

The Chinese government is using an "anti-discrimination" investigation as their reasoning for the tariffs. They launched the so-called investigation last fall.

The tariffs come as Canadian farmers are facing challenges on multiple fronts, including a trade war with the United States, the Chinese tariffs as well as animal disease concerns.

Canadian farmers grow more than 21 million acres of canola each year, with it generating \$13.6 billion in farm cash receipts in 2023. Last year Canada exported nearly \$470 million worth of port products to China. 🍀

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Soil compaction costs farmers

By Jeff Helsdon

If there is one message that came through loud and clear during Dr. Iam McDonald's presentation at the Norfolk Soil and Crop Improvement Association's Agronomy Day it was that soil compaction will cost farmers.

"It costs you if you ignore it, it costs you if you try to fix it," he said, saying costs can be fixing fields or upgrading equipment.

During his presentation at the annual event in late March, McDonald, a crop innovation specialist with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agri-Business, shared recent research about soil compaction and some of the solutions.

Soil is a dynamic living ecosystem. Compaction happens when the pore space is reduced because weight is applied to the soil. A variety of factors contribute to compaction, including the timing of field operations, the type of equipment used, the weight of equipment, crop selection and the return of organic matter to the soil.

McDonald's research found soil compaction can reduce yields 15 to 50 per cent. The amount of yield reduction is a function of field layout, long-term management through crop rotation and tillage, equipment set up related to tires and the number of axles, field conditions (related to dryness) and how much traffic is on a field.

One experiment looked at the soil pressure by using three different configurations of tires and tracks on combines. There was more penetration with tires with 40 PSI tire pressure than 10 PSI tires. Yield loss was examined at different soil depths, and was two to four per cent yield loss with the compaction deeper down, which took longer to recover. With shallow compaction, there was up to 15 per cent yield loss, but it recovered more quickly.

Deeper compaction is caused by the total mass on the soil. The mid-level compaction is associated more with axle weight and shallow compaction is related to tire pressure.

McDonald noted the larger equipment used today has more impact.

Another comparison was between the impact on the yield between the trafficked area with a grain cart, 36-row planter, 16-row combine and manure spreader. While there wasn't a drastic reduction in yield in the trafficked area if the soil was dry, it was more drastic when it was wet. The grain cart had the greatest reduction of 55 bushels in wet soil in the traveled area on a yield of 193 bushels in the untraveled area. Yield in the travelled area with wet soil was 171 bushels with the planter, 168 with the manure spreader and 150 with the combine.

Solutions to lessening soil compaction were lowering axle weight and total load, avoiding wet soils and lowering the tire pressure as much as possible. A central tire inflation system allows deflation in the tires to decrease compaction and inflating tires for travel on the road.

"It requires a change in thinking and we need to get better at being critical thinkers because of all the things working against us right now," McDonald said.

He suggested a maximum tire weight of 7,500 pounds and maximum tire pressure of 20 p.s.i.

Presenting a list of 14 methods of lessening compaction, MCDonald said it's good to make one improvement, better to do two and the impacts are exponential with doing more. Items on the list were: tile drainage, build better soils, avoid wet soils, bigger tires, lower tire PSI, use inflation/deflation system, better tires, more tires/axles, less passes, less tillage, control traffic, lower weight loads, choose configurations carefully and be patient. 🍏



Ian McDonald of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness spoke on soil compaction at the Norfolk Soil and Crop Improvement Association's annual agronomy day. His strong message was that soil compaction costs, both in reduced yields and in addressing the problems.

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“Ag Day” returns to Hagersville as part of its 150th anniversary celebrations on June 6

By Diane Baltaz

A former spring agricultural cultural event that ran in Hagersville for years is returning this June as the centerpiece of the town’s 150th anniversary celebrations.

Ag Day – short for Agriculture Day – was celebrated in the public spaces of Hagersville in late May or early June from 1983 to 1999 to celebrate the community’s agricultural heritage. It was then co-sponsored by the Haldimand Federation of Agriculture and the Hagersville and District Chamber of Commerce as a means of celebrating and making citizens aware of agriculture’s economic and cultural importance to the region.

This spring, Ag Day is being revived and expanded as the centerpiece of the town’s sesquicentennial, in a day-long celebration which will occupy most of Hagersville public spaces and one major downtown street. It is happening on Friday, June 6, with official opening ceremonies at home and ending with music in the evening.

“Ag Day is our signature event, the biggest part of the 150th,” said Lisa Mattice, who co-chairs the Hagersville 150 celebrations along

with Nancy Snyder. “It (the original Ag Days) was a fan favourite; since most of the community has asked to bring it back – here we are.”

According to the Hagersville 150 social media, the original Ag Days ran on a Friday along Alma Street, the park and Market Square. It featured agricultural exhibits, commodity group publicity, an antique farm equipment showcase, live entertainment, craft vendors, food stalls, pony rides and local farm animals that families could interact with.

The committee is restoring these previous activities as well as adding in additional attractions. Alma Street will again be closed to traffic in order to house the farm animals, including horses, pigs, cows and llamas as well as a sheep shearing demonstration.

The park, now known as Sergeant Andrew Harnett Memorial Park, will have a stage for music and the opening ceremonies, which begins with Town Crier Larry Davis – who doubles as the Ontario Federation of Agriculture representative for Brant,



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Haldimand and Norfolk. Modern agricultural equipment will be displayed in addition to exhibits by the Walpole Antique Farm Machinery Association.

The park and Market Square will host many agricultural commodity groups, food trucks and local businesses, including the Haldimand-Norfolk Beekeepers Association and the Haldimand Federation of Agriculture. A face painter is encouraged to use farm themes. Instead of the traditional bouncy castle, Snyder and Mattice said that the committee is bringing in agriculture themed inflatables such as tractors.

But agriculture is not the only pillar of Hagersville's past. Incorporated as a police village in 1875, the town grew up around its railway line (Canada Southern and CN) and the gypsum mines which first opened in the 1880s, both of which are depicted alongside farm scene in the community's official sesquicentennial logo.

Consequently, CN Rail is bringing in its Little Obie Safety Train – a

miniature CN locomotive with a flat car and caboose that can hold 16 passengers. Also, the Canadian Gypsum Company will exhibit gypsum's contribution to community development alongside of other exhibitors, art and historical displays and community groups.

Residents also have a chance to co-create a permanent community memorial of Ag Day, 2025 – a large, aluminum, paint-by-number panel featuring Hagersville scenes.

"It will be displayed afterward in town," said Mattice. "We want the community to be part of the picture."

"We are staying pretty true to what we had in the original Ag Days, other than what we incorporated the railway and the Canadian Gypsum Company," said Snyder. "Ag Day is our focus but we have other elements for the celebration."

Hagersville is named after brothers David and Charles Hager, early settlers who bought land around the Indian Line and the Plank Road (now Highway 6). 🍁

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It's never too early or too late to start succession planning

By Teresa Van Raay

A significant portion of Canada's economy is powered by small and medium sized businesses. In fact, according to Statistics Canada, what are known as SMEs represent 98 per cent of all Canadian businesses and employ about two-thirds of the Canadian workforce.

Many of these businesses also happen to be family owned – and often family-run as well. That's certainly the case in agriculture, where the latest figures show that 98 per cent of Canadian farms are owned and operated by families.

It's also no secret that Canada, like many countries in the Western world, has an aging population with an imminent wave of retirements as the Baby Boomer generation transitions out of the workforce. In the agriculture sector, for example, statistics point to a potential of up to 40 per cent of farmers retiring by 2033.

That's why planning for the future of a business is so important. Whether the ultimate outcome involves a transition to next-generation family members or to a new owner altogether, the process of transition or succession planning is one that takes careful thought and effort from both the incoming and outgoing owners.

The story is a bit more complex in agriculture because in most cases, farm business transition also involves the family home and often an agricultural legacy dating back multiple generations – so the stakes are also high emotionally.

What is surprising, then, is that approximately 66 per cent of farmers are not prepared for succession and don't have a plan in place as to what it's going to look like.

To help draw attention to this important topic and encourage farmers to start thinking about it, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) has just wrapped up its third year of running a Fi-

nancial Literacy and Farm Succession Planning Roadshow together with Farm Life Financial, a consultancy that specializes in this field.

This included a series of in-person workshops across Ontario as well as a virtual session that was recorded and is now available for viewing on the OFA website.

I'm a director on the board of the OFA, and I farm with my family near Grand Bend, where we raise pigs, and grow corn, soybeans, wheat and garlic.

My husband and I are still actively involved in the business, but we work alongside two of our kids who also play key roles in the farm – so I know first-hand how important and complex succession planning can be.

It's not as easy as simply handing over the reins or stepping away. In a family transition, the business must both provide for the retirement of the existing generation as well as support a living for the next generation.

It's also not always easy to step away from something that you've dedicated your life to building up. In the case of farming, it's usually not just a business, it's also a passion for agriculture and a love of the lifestyle that keeps us so committed to what we do.

If you're not sure how to get started, a good place to get a sense of what it all means is by watching the video and reviewing the resources on the OFA website: ofa.on.ca/issues/succession-planning.

A few other tips that I've learned along the way:

Keep the lines of communications open with the next generation, including any kids you have who don't want to farm, and be honest with yourself about what your expectations are for retirement.

Make sure you write things down, including any contributions your kids may have already made to the business.

Have regular meetings as a team where you treat each other like co-workers and step away from your more traditional family roles or relationships.

Consult with accountants, lawyers and financial planners. They are the experts in taxation, shareholder agreements, transition and financial matters and their advice will help guide your process – and likely save you some money while you're at it.

And finally, it's never too early or too late to start. No matter how old your kids are, if you haven't thought about developing a succession plan, now is as good a time as any to get the process going.

Teresa Van Raay is a director with the Ontario Federation of Agriculture 🍁



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Vintage farm equipment tour 2025 on long weekend

By Teresa Van Raay

The Haldimand County Vintage Farm Equipment and Collectibles Tour is coming up on the May long weekend (May 17, 18, 19), with over 30 collectors exhibiting in four locations.

The Walpole Antique Farm Machinery Association's (WAFMA) museum is at the centre of it, located at 2050 Main St. South in Jarvis (Hwy 6). The WAFMA museum features hundreds of large and small agricultural antiques, including dozens of tractors and several collectors' displays. This is also the home of the old Jarvis train station, which will also be open to the public that weekend.

Dave and Mike Doughty's, 53 Talbot St. East in Jarvis (Hwy 3) feature Case, IH and Farmall equipment, including IH trucks and a shopmule along with many other items.

The Sitter Massey Memories Museum in Hagersville has many more interesting things to see, including demonstrations of rope making and agricultural artwork by Karen Zanderson and an antique radio collection.

Jim and Guy's Hart Parr Haven, 3910 Hwy 3, Nelles Corners, is home to a working pumpcabbage cannon, a working rock crusher and hundreds - maybe thousands of other items, large and small. The collection of metal implement seats is amazing by itself.

Buildings and displays are open from 9-5 each of the three days.

There is lots more to see than has been mentioned, as there are many other collectors who display their items at these locations. Come on out and get a glimpse into history at this unique event. 🍀

Conservationist recognized



Brian Woolley, right, of the Port Dover area was presented with the Long Point Conservation Authority's Conservation Stewardship Award by authority chairman Dave Beres at the group's annual meeting. He has done a lot of work on his farm to improve the environment, including planting grassed waterways to reduce erosion, planted more than 4,000 trees, and tries to find ways to reduce invasive species. His farm is also enrolled in ALUS.

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By Alexandra Dockx
My name is Alexandra Dockx. I am a director on the Norfolk Soil and Crop Improvement Association, a sales agronomist at Underhill's Farm Supply in Vienna, and part of the fourth generation on our family's cash crop operation. I am very proud to be part of Norfolk's rich and diverse agricultural community.

Agriculture is the backbone of Norfolk County. From grains and oilseeds to horticulture and specialty crops, our land produces a wide range of food that support not just our local economy, but communities across the province. We are home to some of the most innovative and resilient farmers in Ontario—and that's something to be proud of!

As we move into another busy season, I wanted to take a moment to reflect on some recent highlights from our Norfolk Soil and Crop group and share a few exciting things coming.

March Grower Day – A Big Success
Thank you to everyone who joined us for our annual Grower Day in March. We had a great turnout and an excellent lineup of speakers covering topics from our Norfolk Compaction Day results to water movement in Norfolk County soils under different irrigation methods, along with some exciting updates on new technology.



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gy from precision planting. A big thank you goes out to all of our sponsors, presenters, and volunteers who helped make the day a success.

Upcoming Bus Tour – Mark Your Calendars

We’re excited to announce our upcoming Soil & Crop Bus Tour, happening July 30th. This is a great opportunity to step off the farm, visit some progressive operations, and connect with fellow growers. The tour will include stops at innovative farms & Ag business locations focused on crop diversity, soil health, and ag-tech, followed by dinner to wrap up the day.

The bus departs from Ramblin’ Road Brewery at 11:30 a.m, dinner to follow at Ramblin’ Road Brewery.

- Cost: \$45 for members and \$75 for non-members which includes a membership.

Spaces will be limited, so be sure to register early!

2025 Field Trials – Stay Involved

We’re moving ahead with a strong lineup of field trials for 2025, focused on providing practical, local data to help support on-farm decisions. This year’s trials will include:

- Most economical nitrogen rate (M.E.N.R.)
- Sulfur applications on soybeans
- Accounting for nitrogen volatilization using dosimeters

If you’re interested in participating in a trial, please reach out to one of the directors. We’d love to work with you.

Soil & Crop Bursary – Supporting the Next Generation

The Norfolk Soil & Crop Bursary is now open for applications! This is a fantastic opportunity for local students pursuing post-secondary education in agriculture or ag-related fields. If you know a student who qualifies, please encourage them to apply. All local high schools have the information in their guidance departments.

As always, if you have ideas, want to get more involved, or have any questions, don’t hesitate to reach out to James Kingsbury our President at james@sandyshore.ca or Tracey Court our secretary at tracey@court-farms.ca.

Farming in Norfolk is more than just a job—it’s a way of life. It takes dedication, innovation, and community support to keep it thriving. Let’s continue to work together, share knowledge, and support each other as we head into another planting season. Wishing everyone a safe, and successful spring! 🍁

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Jennifer Schooley shared a photo taken on the family farm in 1910. She notes the photo shows several things that have changed:

The spacing between the trees. The trees back then were much bigger, and often needed 40 feet in between trees - which is about 80 trees an acre. To put that into perspective, we grow about 1,000 - 1,300 trees per acre now, planting them three feet apart.

The wooden ladder. We still use ladders today (light, aluminum ones), but this old wooden ladder (which we still have here in the barn) climbs up two floors. Which means those trees were huge. In fact, they wouldn't have been able to harvest all the fruit from the tops of those trees (due to time, as well as not being able to reach them all). To put this into perspective - our trees now reach about eight feet high and are a totally different type of tree now.



Those wooden baskets! I can't even imagine how challenging those would have been to use. We have picking sacks now, that we wear over our shoulders with comfy shoulder straps, and they have straps that can open the bottom up, so when putting the apples in bins now, they hardly

bruise. We used to have these wicker baskets, but they have disintegrated over time.

Wooden barrels - that's what was used to ship the apples. They would have fit two bushels in each barrel (which would be about 84 pounds of apples). Someone would have had to clip

the stems off each apple so they didn't puncture the other apples, and another person would have had to place each one in the barrel by hand so they fit correctly. Each barrel was then sealed with the barrel-press, which we have in our barn as well. My dad recalls the barrels being taken over to Bloomsburg to get on the train to be shipped.

The things that haven't changed about apples over time: it's all hand harvested.

Norfolk Farms is launching a new feature called "Our Agricultural Heritage". The concept is for readers to submit photos of the tractors that helped their ancestors tame the land, along with a short write-up about the photo, and it will be published in Norfolk Farms. The deadline for the next issue is June 1. Please send scans or electronic copies of photos and information to jeff@granthaven.com

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OUR AGRICULTURAL HERITAGE

BY ANDREW MOORE

New Exhibit Coming to the Delhi Tobacco Museum in May



Beginning in the 1980s, many Canadian tobacco farmers were faced with a difficult reality – crop prices and cigarette sales were down, taxation was up, and the pressure from government agencies and anti-smoking lobbies regarding the adverse health effects of smoking was starting to mount.

Next month, the Delhi Tobacco Museum & Heritage Centre will launch a new exhibit titled “What’s the Alternative?” The exhibit will explore how the once booming Canadian tobacco industry reached this crisis point, and how resilient farmers responded by restructuring their farms and embracing alternative crop opportunities.

In the 1960s and ‘70s, a seismic shift across North America’s entire agricultural sector ushered in the second phase of tobacco production. Smaller family farms began to be bought up by larger entities at a rapid rate. Over the next two decades, two-thirds of tobacco farms in Ontario’s main tobacco belt would cease to exist. This decrease in farms paralleled an increase in overall acreage being devoted to tobacco. Farm yields became larger and were harvested more efficiently with less labour. Unfortunately, this regional concentration of to-

bacco made it susceptible to natural calamities like the dreaded blue mold outbreak of 1979.

The third phase of Ontario’s tobacco story has been marked by both significant financial and cultural struggles. Changes in global trade, the end of critical preferential tariffs, and the emergence of new tobacco growing regions in countries with cheaper labour and fewer regulations, hit the Canadian market hard in the 1970s. These changes opened a once almost exclusive market, forcing Canada to compete not only with the United States, but the entire world. However, the most devastating economic pressure point for local farmers was the steep rise in interest rates, which peaked at 22 per cent in the 1980s. Financing each year’s crop by bank credit quickly became possible only for the largest operations.

Perhaps the biggest reason for the restructuring of the industry – at least domestically – was the decline in cigarette sales. Anti-smoking lobbies, laws banning cigarette advertising and sponsorships, an increased “sin tax” on the product, and aggressive government health campaigns, all contributed to a deterioration in sales. Between 1981 and 1986, sales dropped by 17 per cent while the amount of tobacco

needed to make each cigarette dropped by 10 per cent.

The impact of tobacco on the town of Delhi and the surrounding area during the 20th century cannot be overstated: the crop brought in decades of investment, provided farm families with unprecedented opportunities for upward financial mobility, led to numerous agricultural innovations, and encouraged people to settle here and build our rich community into what it is today. The decision taken by many local tobacco farmers in the 1980s to transition from tobacco to alternative crops was never made lightly. The tobacco sector revealed both its vulnerability and its flexibility. Tobacco had shown surprising resilience based on many factors. The strength within the sector is highlighted by its community action and a willingness to consider and adopt alternatives. Norfolk County is now one of the most diversified agricultural areas in Canada. Along with tobacco we have ginseng, lavender, wineries, peanuts and much more.

Starting May 28, visit the museum to learn more about the trials and triumphs of growing tobacco and alternative crops in Ontario’s Garden. The DTMHC is open to the public Wednesday to Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. 🍀



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