



2026 FALL FARM EDITION



From 2,000 bulbs to 40,000, Perth South flower farm continues to bloom



(GALEN SIMMONS PHOTO)

Perth South's The Crazy Glad Lady, Laura Hardeman Good, stands in front of her flower field where she planted 40,000 gladiolus bulbs earlier this year, which are now in full bloom.

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

What began with 2,000 gladiolus bulbs and a couple acres of farmland near St. Pauls has blossomed into 40,000 flowers planted each year and a roadside business with customers who come from near and far to "pick their own rainbow."

For the past 19 years, Laura Hardeman Good, better known as The Crazy Glad Lady, has grown gladioli on her Perth South farm, selling the colourful cut flowers from her roadside stand and at the St. Marys Farmers' Market.

The business began when Good's youngest child was about 18 months old and she was preparing to return to work.

"We had just bought a new farm and I'm like, 'Do you think I could have a couple of acres? I'm going to try something,'" Good recalled.

The choice of flower came partly from the annual decoration service at nearby Avonbank Church. Good's mother-in-law would purchase flowers to decorate

family graves, and Good wondered if she could grow them herself.

"I don't know that it ever turned out to be a savings for her," she joked.

What started with 2,000 bulbs grew year after year until Good reached the roughly 40,000 she plants today.

Those bulbs go into the ground over five or six plantings each spring, sometimes before her husband has planted his corn. This year, Good was planting in mittens.

Flowers generally begin appearing around mid-July and continue until frost, ideally carrying the season through Thanksgiving.

Good waits until each stem has three blossoms before cutting, giving customers a more colourful display than gladioli typically harvested earlier for wholesale markets.

At the height of the season, as many as 30 pails of flowers can line the roadside stand, with colours ranging from white and pink to deep reds and nearly black.

"When they're doing well, when



(GALEN SIMMONS PHOTO)

The Crazy Glad Lady sells cut gladioli of all different colours from her roadside stand near St. Pauls in Perth South.

they're in full flush, we have everything," Good said. "When you come, you get to pick your own rainbow. You get to take home what calls to your heart."

Growing that rainbow isn't without its challenges.

Tiny insects called thrips can burrow into the flowers and damage blossoms, while fusarium, a type of fungi, can kill plants after they emerge. Gladioli also require significant crop rotation, with Good saying she generally cannot plant them on the same ground again for about seven years.

That means finding new areas among the farm's wheat, corn and soybean rotation each season, preferably close enough to the road for passing motorists to enjoy the view.

And plenty stop.

Along with local customers, Good has welcomed people travelling through Perth County and even customers who made the drive from Toronto during the COVID-19 pandemic simply to buy flowers and bring some colour home.

"Just a chance to make somebody's day feel a little better, actually," Good said of what her flowers provide.

That idea inspired this year's "A Little Gladier World" campaign. Good offered four to six dozen flowers to people with ideas for sharing them with others, including residents of local nursing homes.

The inspiration came from a small rock someone once left at her stand bearing the message, "Today is a good day to be happy."

"I really like that they bring so much joy to people's lives," she said.

For Good, that connection is what has kept a small experiment growing for nearly two decades.

"It makes me really happy," she said. "I love it."

The Crazy Glad Lady sells gladioli seasonally from her roadside stand near St. Pauls and at the St. Marys Farmers' Market. Good can be reached at crazygladlady@gmail.com or 226-927-7963, and The Crazy Glad Lady can also be found on Instagram.




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Becoming part of a dairy farming team: An inside look at Kirkton Vet Clinic's dairy veterinary services

EMILY STEWART

Independent Reporter

Dr. Robyn Elgie, a dairy veterinarian with the Kirkton Vet Clinic, said the practice is unique compared to other veterinary care.

A dairy veterinarian will travel to see their clients regularly, usually every two weeks, to check for pregnancy, milking parlor protocols, medical treatment as needed and disease-prevention initiatives like vaccine protocols.

"You get to know the clients that you work with really well because you see them all the time and you definitely become part of their team on the farm and their advising committee that they have and they get information from," said Dr. Elgie.

The Kirkton Vet Clinic will also have emergencies every day, so there must be a block of time in her schedule left open and free from pre-booked appointments for her to travel as far as an hour and a half one way.

In addition to Kirkton and surrounding areas, Dr. Elgie travels as far as Parkhill and Sarnia to treat the cattle at farms in those areas, as there is limited access to veterinary treatment there.

"That didn't always used to be the case. ... Every small town had a clinic that did both large and small, but just the way that the livestock industries have gone and there's less livestock farms in those areas than there used to be, it just didn't support large animal (veterinary care) out there," she said.

The Kirkton Vet Clinic is a large veterinary clinic

that can accommodate out-of-town clients.

"Nowadays, farmers are really good and we spend a lot of time teaching them on how to do a lot of treatment and techniques on their own or at least in the interim until we get there, and educating them on detecting things early on in the process so that if it does take a bit of time to get intervention there to help, then we haven't lost time by just not checking the animal soon enough," said Dr. Elgie.

Dairy veterinary practices, such as disease prevention, are an important role in agri-food production and for large animal care.

"Every large animal veterinarian that's in that agricultural space cares pretty strongly about food safety and producing the best quality food that we can, so that's one aspect of it is making sure we are preventing disease as much as possible – so helping farmers have access to vaccines and to use them appropriately so they can get the most out of them, but also on the other side of just the care for the animals," Dr. Elgie said.

The personal connection between the dairy vet and their patients is what drove Dr. Elgie to the speciality, and she also enjoys the drives out to the farms.

"It can be long days and lots of driving, but your office is the countryside and living in Ontario, we get to see a lot of beautiful scenery," she said.

More information about the Kirkton Vet Clinic can be found online by visiting kirktonvetclinic.com.



(DR. ROBYN ELGIE PHOTO)

Dr. Robyn Elgie is a dairy veterinarian with the Kirkton Vet Clinic. She travels to dairy farms in the area and as far as Sarnia to provide care to cattle.

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Come visit McCully's Hill Farm and bring the whole family!

EMILY STEWART

Independent Reporter

There's always something to do at McCully's Hill Farm, whatever time of year it is.

The farm runs a pancake brunch on Saturdays and Sundays in March where guests can enjoy pancakes, baked beans, sausage and McCully's maple syrup. McCully's will partner with organizations like the Optimist Club and Lions Club, as well as local schools, to raise money for charities like the Ronald McDonald House.

The maple tours also run in March where visitors can take a wagon ride to the top of the hill to meet farm animals, and then through the sugar bush and to the sugar shack to learn about maple syrup production.

"We meet a lot of people who remember making maple syrup with their grandparents or with their dads just boiling it on a small scale or some of them, on a large scale, but they're removed from it now so it's nice for them to come back and see it," said owner Dennis Aarts. "It's just a real Canadian thing. It's fun and unique so people really enjoy that."

During the summer, McCully's runs a day camp for children involving nature hikes, visits with farm animals and games.

Schools will also take tours during the spring and fall.

"School tours are a really good opportunity. We try to let the kids interact with the animals in a safe way. We have some animals that are used to being handled and stuff like that, so it's pretty exciting for them," Aarts said.

Throughout October on Saturdays and Sundays, McCully's runs the Harvest Festival which features a tractor-drawn wagon ride to see farm animals, the popular pumpkin catapult, a straw tent for children to play in, a corn maze and a horse-drawn wagon ride through the forest to see fall foliage.

"Usually, the forest is decorated Halloween-ish, so you could say it's a bit of a haunted forest," Aarts said.

Lucid Musings Photography runs Santa photos in



(EMILY STEWART PHOTO)

McCully's Hill Farm, located just outside of St. Marys, is a year-round stop for locals looking to reconnect with agriculture and have some good, old-fashioned seasonal fun.

McCully's greenhouse in November, with proceeds supporting the local food bank.

In addition to activities, McCully's runs a year-round store with items like homemade sweet and savory pies, tarts and cookies, preserves, soups, stews and chillis, as well as seasonal produce and meats. For example, the store will sell fresh turkeys for Thanksgiving and Christmas.

"We try to source everything as locally as we can, but of course you can't get local peaches and stuff like that, so same thing with our ingredients, we try to get things

as locally sourced as we can," Aarts said.

The store also carries products from other businesses like Kintore Coffee Co., Sheldon's Berries, Barrie's Asparagus, and Heeman's Greenhouse in Thorndale. McCully's will also get peaches from Niagara and apples from Blanford-Blenheim.

"We've got a lot of good relationships with local places and I think that's important."

More information can be found online by visiting www.mccullys.ca.

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45 years of caring for animals: Dr. Larry Joosse retires after long veterinary career

WENDY LAMOND

Independent Reporter

For many St. Marys pet owners who have brought their animals to the St. Marys Veterinary Clinic (SMVC), Dr. Larry Joosse has been a familiar and caring presence.

Known to many simply as Dr. Larry, Joosse has spent decades caring for animals and building relationships with their owners. After a veterinary career spanning 45 years, Joosse is hanging up his stethoscope and calling it a day.

Growing up in Grimsby, Joosse initially thought about becoming a doctor before developing an interest in wildlife. He began studying fisheries and wildlife biology but remained interested in medicine. By his second year at university, he had decided to become a veterinarian.

Joosse completed his Bachelor of Science degree at the University of Guelph and graduated from veterinary college in 1981.

During his final year, one of his rotations involved two weeks of farm-service calls. Through a mutual colleague of Dr. Rob Bell, Joosse learned the St. Marys clinic had room for two veterinarians interested in working in the farm sector.

That February, Joosse drove through a snowstorm for a 15-minute interview with Dr. Ken Schiedel and Bell.

The surrounding farm community caught his interest, but so did the opportunity to care for pets. Joosse and his wife, Patsy, whom he met at school, moved to St. Marys.

Veterinary medicine looked much different in those days. An emergency phone line for after-hours calls was set up in the veterinarians' homes, and their spouses often answered those calls. The veterinarians had their own vehicles and each handled farm calls.

As the clinic's companion-animal practice continued to grow, Joosse gradually spent more time caring for pets. His last farm call was sometime in 2008, and he eventually worked exclusively at the clinic.

Caring for pets also meant helping families through some of their most difficult moments.

Asked how he dealt with the emotional days when clients had to say goodbye to a beloved pet, Joosse said having other veterinarians around for support made a difference. Talking with colleagues helped, as did in-person meetings with other veterinary groups.

The trust he developed with clients over the years also helped.

When asked what has changed most during his career, Joosse pointed to both farming and the increasingly important place pets hold within families.

"The farms have gotten bigger and bigger and pets became more part of the family," he said. "I have also seen a big change in the support staff structure. When I started, there was one vet technician and five vets."

Technology has also transformed veterinary medicine.

Joosse remembers when blood samples had to be sent away for analysis, with results sometimes taking four days or longer. Today, in-house equipment can provide results in 15 to 25 minutes. X-ray technology has advanced considerably, and the clinic now has a handheld ultrasound machine.

While those advances can contribute to higher costs, they also allow veterinarians to make more accurate diagnoses and receive results much faster.

When asked what advice he would offer young veterinarians beginning their careers, Joosse emphasized



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Dr. Larry Joosse is retiring after 45 years in veterinary medicine, much of that time spent caring for farm animals and family pets in the St. Marys area. Joosse joined the St. Marys Veterinary Clinic after graduating from veterinary college in 1981 and built lasting relationships with generations of clients, colleagues and their animals.

the importance of continuing to learn and leaning on others during difficult times.

"Keep learning, keep your passion. If you have a rough day, talk to your colleagues, family or friends," he said.

Over 45 years, Joosse also encountered his share of unusual patients.

The clinic even made the Kitchener news one year after someone found a stray iguana in St. Marys and brought it in for care.

"I knew nothing about iguanas," Joosse recalled with a laugh.

Something many people may not know about Joosse is he also visited local public schools to teach children about caring for animals. Sometimes he brought along his dog and pieces of medical equipment, explaining his job and answering the many questions students had.

He also served on the executive of the Kitchener Veterinary Academy for many years.

Now, Joosse is looking forward to having more time with his wife, Patsy, their two children and four grandchildren.

He considers himself fortunate to have essentially enjoyed two careers in one, first working alongside farmers and their livestock and later focusing on the pets that increasingly became members of the family.

Asked what he will miss most, Joosse didn't hesitate.

"I will miss the people and the pets," he said. "My work family has been great over the years, my own family has been wonderful and the community is so great."

It doesn't take long at the clinic to understand how highly Joosse is regarded by those who worked alongside him.

Schiedel, who worked with Joosse from the beginning, described him as an exceptionally caring veterinarian.

"He was always the most caring person in a clinical environment saturated with caring people and despite getting older, Larry was eager to learn and stay current with the best and most updated treatment options for his patients," Schiedel said.

Nancy Riddell began working at the clinic as a high school student and went on to work with Joosse for roughly 40 years.

"After more than 40 years, it is difficult to put into words what Larry has meant to me, to veterinary medicine and to the St. Marys community," Riddell said.

She remembers when Larry and Patsy arrived in St. Marys in 1981 and she was working at the clinic after school and on Saturdays, never imagining those shifts would lead to more than four decades of friendship, laughter and memories.

Riddell said what she admired most was Joosse's compassion.

"He never just saw the animal in front of him – he saw the person who loved that animal. He understood that pets are family and he cared about the whole family. That kind of compassion cannot be taught from a textbook. It is simply part of who Larry is."

Over the years, Riddell said they encountered enough interesting patients and characters to fill a book, something the two often joked about.

"There have been crazy days, quiet days, difficult days and plenty of laughter," she said. "When I think about more than 40 years of working together, it isn't one moment that stands out. It's all the little things – the conversations, the familiar faces, the problem-solving, the laughter and simply knowing that Larry was there."

Lisa McEwan, who worked with Joosse for 38 years, said his booming laugh, endless smiles and quiet steadiness made him an anchor for those around him at the clinic.

"It was an absolute privilege to learn from and work alongside this amazing, selfless man whose love for his career, his co-workers, his clients and especially his patients was palpable every day," McEwan said.

Karen Whittaker, who also worked with Joosse for 38 years, said Dr. Larry, or Dr. J, made a 45-year career in veterinary medicine look easy.

"'Do what you love, love what you do' is Dr. J, whether he was advocating for our pets or problem-solving medical cases," Whittaker said. "He brought calmness and empathy along with familiarity in all he did. He may have hung up his stethoscope for the last time but the impact he has made at SMVC and our community will last forever."

Veterinary technician Katie Avery also reflected on Joosse's dedication and passion for his career.

"Your patience, dedication and passion towards your career was so admirable. Working alongside you for many years was such an honour," Avery said. "The people and animals in our community were fortunate to have you as their vet. Your family was blessed to work with you, and you will be missed here dearly."

After 45 years, it is easy to see the difference Joosse has made to his colleagues, clients and the countless animals he has cared for.

While retirement means hanging up his stethoscope, the relationships Joosse built with animals, their owners, his colleagues and the wider St. Marys community will remain an important part of his legacy.

St. Marys Farmers' Market remains rooted in local food and community

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

More than three decades after the first vendors set up shop in a downtown parking lot, much has changed at the St. Marys Farmers' Market.

But according to St. Marys Farmers' Market Association chair Ann Slater, what matters most has stayed remarkably consistent.

"The same commitment to providing local food to local people and supporting local farmers and local food artisans; that's stayed the same," Slater said.

The market dates back to 1992, when the Town of St. Marys invited Farmers' Markets Ontario to give a presentation on starting a farmers' market. By the first Saturday in July, a volunteer board had opened the market in the town-owned Jones Street parking lot.

Slater was among those original vendors and remains the only vendor who has been there since the beginning. Sheldon Berries joined in 1993 and has also remained a longtime fixture.

Over the years, some vendors have used the market as a starting point for businesses that eventually grew beyond

it, while others have come and gone as their circumstances changed.

"It fluctuates," Slater said. "I've learned over the years not to get too wound up because new people pop up."

The market continues to welcome new vendors, particularly farmers and growers. It remains a producer-based market, meaning resellers are not permitted and at least 50 per cent of its vendors must be farmers or growers selling what they produce themselves.

Beyond farmers, the market includes local food producers and artisans selling everything from baking, preserves and crafts to meat, fruit and vegetables.

Vendors generally come from within 35 kilometres of St. Marys, though the association board can make exceptions for products that aren't otherwise available locally.

That focus, Slater said, gives people an opportunity to meet those producing their food while providing small agricultural businesses with direct access to customers.

"It's a way to introduce people to your product," she said.

The biggest change over the market's history has been its location.

After nearly three decades on Jones

Street, pandemic restrictions forced the market to move to Delmar Foods in 2020. Slater said it was the first farmers' market in Perth County to reopen that spring after organizers worked with public health to develop a safe way of operating.

The following year, the market moved to Milt Dunnell Field, where the town made improvements to accommodate it, including expanding and eventually paving the parking area to improve accessibility.

The location has helped reinforce another important part of the market's identity: it isn't just somewhere to shop.

"I think it builds community," Slater said. "It strengthens us to be part of a vendor community rather than just ourselves."

It also creates a community among shoppers.

On Saturday mornings, people often linger after shopping to talk with friends, have coffee or take their purchases to nearby picnic tables while children play at the park.

"It becomes part of their routine," Slater said.

That community atmosphere has increasingly included special events.

The market held a pet day this summer and temporarily relocated downtown during the Stonetown Heritage Festival. This fall will see the return of two popular traditions.

Apple Pie Day invites residents to enter homemade pies, preferably made using market or Ontario apples. Slices are sold following judging while whole pies are auctioned, with proceeds supporting the market.

Harvest Soup Day follows Thanksgiving, with retired local chef Chris Wolf using ingredients from market vendors to prepare soups that are sold as another fundraiser.

The outdoor market's 2026 season continues Saturdays from 8 a.m. to noon at Milt Dunnell Field through Oct. 31. Indoor markets are also planned following the outdoor season.

For Slater, however, the market's longevity ultimately comes back to the same idea that inspired its creation in 1992.

"I think our being producer-based, we've stuck to that," she said. "Producer-focused, community-focused."

More information about vendors, events and the market is available at st-marysfarmersmarket.ca.



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Huron, Perth honeybee hive losses lower than many areas

JOHN MINER

Contributed Article

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

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

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

The overall average loss for Ontario was 45.3 per cent.

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

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

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

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



(JOHN MINER PHOTO)

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

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

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

The mites are a serious issue for bee-

keepers, requiring regular monitoring and sometimes multiple treatments, Neeb said. Populations can grow exponentially during a season.

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

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

"Yes, you have a new hive, but it is not nearly as strong as it would be if left as

a single colony. This can result in lower honey yields and, for some beekeepers with pollination contracts, fewer viable colonies to provide for pollination," Neeb said.

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

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

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

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

The research involves sampling hives twice in a season to compare mite levels and then selecting the ones with lower mite numbers for new bee colonies.

The Ontario Beekeepers Association is also calling for investments in research and extension to help beekeepers be more resilient in the face of high winter losses.

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

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Oversupply and trade issues drive down dry bean prices for Ontario growers

AMANDA NELSON

Independent Reporter

The 2026 Ontario Bean Growers annual general meeting was held in Stratford earlier this year, where dry bean growers from across the region came together to discuss growing concerns around exports, particularly trade, transportation and domestic demand.

Alvin Klassen of Dry Bean World outlined current challenges as Canada continues to navigate overproduction of black beans and ongoing tariff changes that are limiting trade and creating uncertainty for growers.

"In the last five years, we've experienced several severe ups and downs in commercial markets related to supply and demand, with the influence of producer and dealer pricing," said Klassen.

Despite steady global demand for dry beans, many growers are finding it harder to turn a profit.

Prices across North America have dropped sharply in recent years – in some cases by nearly half – while input costs such as fuel and fertilizer have remained high.

"Throughout North America, we are now sitting where bean prices are half of what they were three years ago, and the cost of production hasn't gone down at all," said Klassen. "In fact, seed pricing hasn't gone down, and it's making it very difficult to sustain production."

The issue, Klassen said, comes down to supply and demand. A strong harvest has left a surplus of beans in storage – known in the industry as "carryover" – giving buyers less incentive to pay higher prices.



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)

A fresh mixed bean salad is one of the many ways Canadians are encouraged to get more beans in their diet during the Ontario Bean Growers Eat More Beans campaign.

At the same time, export challenges and limited processing options in Canada are making it harder for farmers to move their crops efficiently, adding further pressure to an already strained market.

Jeff English of Pulse Canada said the organization is

working to increase domestic consumption through its "Love Canadian Beans" campaign, which aims to raise awareness that many beans sold in stores are grown in Canada and encourage more people to include them in their diets.

"It's not about telling people how to eat but showing them how beans can be incorporated into everyday foods we already know and love," said English. "It's about giving some familiarity to supporting what we see as a great, sustainably grown Canadian crop."

English added advancements in bean-processing technology could also help grow the domestic market.

"Now that we have companies extracting proteins and starches from pulse crops, we should have an opportunity to put more protein into different foods – not necessarily calling them beans, but using them as a high-protein ingredient," he said.

Bill Rosenberg, parliamentary assistant to the minister of agriculture, food and agribusiness, also addressed growers, highlighting the significant role Ontario's bean producers play in the province's agri-food sector.

"Our agri-food sector now generates around \$52 billion in annual GDP," he said. "This is why Ontario is known around the world for safe, nutritious and delicious food."

"Eighty to 90 per cent of the beans grown here in Ontario are exported around the world, and that is something to be proud of," he added.

Overall, the message to growers was clear: while global demand is growing, the industry must navigate trade instability, supply chain risks and the need to build stronger domestic markets to remain competitive.

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Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers welcome new strategy aimed at helping farmers

AMANDA NELSON

Independent Reporter

With the ever-changing climate for food producers across Canada, including trade shifts, global conflicts and climate change, prices on Ontario produce continue to rise. In response, the federal government has launched Canada's first-ever National Food Security Strategy.

"Too much of what we grow is processed elsewhere, and too many Canadians still rely on imported food at higher prices," said Prime Minister Mark Carney. "Canadian farmers deserve more options to sell their produce, and Canadians deserve more options for where to buy their food."

The National Food Security Strategy includes a \$3.2-billion investment over 10 years with a strong focus on strengthening Canada's food system through a mix of production, infrastructure and regulatory changes aimed at reducing reliance on imported produce, especially in winter.

"This is a significant and forward-looking investment that will directly benefit greenhouse growers across Ontario and Canada," said Richard Lee, executive director of Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers (OGVG).

"The Strategy acknowledges the essential role our

sector plays in producing fresh, nutritious, safe vegetables year-round, while reinforcing Canada's position as a global leader in greenhouse vegetable production, reducing reliance on imports and strengthening supply chains."

A specific \$750-million investment in controlled-environment agriculture (CEA), which includes greenhouses and indoor growing systems, aims to help growers build or expand greenhouse facilities, adopt new growing technologies and produce more fruits and vegetables year-round.

The strategy also aims to support more food processing closer to where crops are grown, meaning infrastructure to turn raw produce into packaged goods locally, reduced transportation costs and reducing spoilage and emissions from long-distance shipping.

The plan also hopes to reduce bottlenecks from farm to processor to retailer and help independent growers and vendors access markets more easily by supporting infrastructure for storage, transport and distribution.

One key point outlined in the plan notes the government is actively looking to cut regulatory barriers, or "red tape," aiming to help speed up approval for fertilizers and crop protection tools, ease the movement of goods across provincial borders and streamline agricultural regulations throughout the country.

"Through this made-in-Canada approach, we will

process more of what our farmers grow here at home, creating jobs, driving economic growth and strengthening Canada's food self-sufficiency," said Heath MacDonald, Canadian minister of agriculture and agri-food.

"By reducing red tape and helping innovative businesses get projects off the ground faster, we will unlock new opportunities for farmers, food processors and entrepreneurs across the agri-food sector."

OGVG says this support will help stabilize food prices in grocery stores, expand producers' market access and reduce the dominance of a few large retailers across the province.

"With the support outlined in this strategy, the greenhouse sector will be able to grow more food more efficiently, and at a lower cost," added Lee. "This benefits not only our farmers, but also Canadian families who are looking for affordable, locally grown food options year-round."

Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers is a not-for-profit organization representing greenhouse farmers who grow tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers in Ontario. With a commitment to innovation, sustainability and food safety, OGVG members supply fresh, high-quality vegetables to Canadians year-round.

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Agricultural drones take flight after Health Canada pesticide approval

AMANDA NELSON

Independent Reporter

A Health Canada approval allowing pesticide application by remotely piloted aircraft systems (RPAS), commonly known as drones, was granted in June, allowing farmers and small businesses across southwestern Ontario to spray pesticides in accordance with the Pest Control Products Act and the Pest Control Products Regulations.

While Canadian farmers have been able to use drones for mapping, scouting and crop monitoring, the major regulatory hurdle has been using them to apply pesticides.

Now that new approvals have opened the door for drone-based pesticide applications, small business owners such as Justin Shieck, owner and operator of Norfolk Drone Services, say they believe farmers can now utilize the technology for greater efficiency.

Shieck was initially taken off guard when he read the report stating that pesticide spraying via drone technology was approved back in June, something he thought he wouldn't see until next year.

"There weren't even signs that this was going to happen by the fall. ... We were taken completely off guard about the approval."

Shieck says countries like China, the United States and Australia have been using drone technology in the agricultural sector for around 15 years, and yet Canada is just starting to see the value after getting feedback from competing countries.

"In the States, drones are treated as another aircraft," he said. "What got me into this business was really watching how fast it expanded across the States and seeing YouTube video after YouTube video and news article after news article showing small businesses booming, with young 20-year-olds and different age groups of farmers enjoying what they're doing and bringing a cheaper solution for farming."

Shieck says he believes farmers throughout Canada



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)

Justin Shieck, owner and operator of Norfolk Drone Services, demonstrates agricultural drone technology. The June Health Canada approval allowing pesticide applications by remotely piloted aircraft systems opens new opportunities for farmers and agricultural businesses.

will soon own and operate drones, similar to the way they own tractors, combines or other farming equipment. He says in farming, timing is everything when it comes to spraying pesticides or fertilizers.

"Do I see every farmer owning one, like a Swiss Army knife in their toolbox? One hundred per cent because farming comes down to timing," said Shieck. "Especially if you're deploying it out of the back of your barn, you can hit timing windows when you really

need to."

Compared to small conventional tractors, drones can cover more ground in less time, at about 40 acres per hour; however, large self-propelled sprayers can cover more than 80 acres per hour. These large sprayers are often hard on fields and don't allow for the same mobility as a drone.

The Health Canada report noted that drone application is often the most practical option when fields are soft, wet or too difficult for ground application equipment; when pest outbreaks occur late in crop growth; or for areas that are either too large or inaccessible for ground application.

"If it's been raining a lot, I don't think anyone's pulling a rig through a field," said Shieck. "Then once a canopy gets high, you can't really spray beans or corn because it's too tall. In the fall, I really see drones tackling the heavy canopies where you're not getting that 25 per cent loss from driving over your beans."

Though Canada is behind in its approval, Shieck says it's not all bad news, and being able to track and assess what's happening in other countries before the Health Canada approval has benefited the budget.

"Canada is cautious," he said. "We take a more science-based regulatory approach than most places, and they do it for safety reasons. I would say it's not a horrible thing that we were behind. Watching and allowing other countries to spend a lot of money on research while we sat back and collected data was valuable. Now we have some brands approved, and we're not wasting that time or money on the trial and error they've already gone through."

The report notes that the approval also aligns Canada with other countries like the United States and Australia, helping Canadian agriculture stay competitive internationally during times when competitive prices are key.

"Using RPAS to apply pesticides can make farming more efficient by helping farmers protect crops while using fewer inputs such as pesticides and other resources needed for crop production, including labour, fuel and equipment use," read the report. "This will support food security and help keep food affordable."

Drone operation is regulated by Transport Canada, whereas the regulation of pesticides is under the jurisdiction of Health Canada. Transport Canada considers aerial drones to be aircraft, and all pilots must understand and follow Canadian Aviation Regulations.

The data show that the risks of applying pesticides by RPAS are generally similar to those of conventional aerial application. However, drones also have the potential to apply pesticides very precisely, similar to some ground-based spot treatments.

Health Canada also concluded that pesticide residues on food crops resulting from RPAS applications are not higher than those resulting from conventional application methods, making foods as safe as with conventional applications.

Shieck's company, Norfolk Drone Services, offers agricultural drone services focused on precision spraying, spreading and mapping. Its main agriculture-related services include aerial spraying, granular spreading, mapping and aerial imagery, as well as drone sales, support and training.

The cost of a drone package varies, but Shieck says it is generally around \$40,000 to \$50,000 and includes multiple batteries and packages, including spray equipment that can be used for pesticides, fertilizers, herbicides and biological products.

Shieck encourages anyone interested to visit his website or reach out to him directly at www.norfolkdrone-services.ca.



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Autonomous robots aim to cut nitrogen fertilizer needs

JOHN MINER

Contributed Article

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It is equipped with front and back cameras, a multi-



(JOHN MINER PHOTO)

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

spectral camera, canopy camera, temperature and humidity sensor, magnetometer and gyroscope. Data is collected metre-by-metre as the robot moves through the field.

"It's really cool, the amount of data that we're gathering on plant health, on how weather conditions affect things," said Franklin.

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

If the base station detects rain, the robots in the field are automatically shut down and stay in place in the field until it dries out enough that they can start back up, return to the station and recharge.

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

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

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



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Ontario soybean farmers face price pressure as China shifts buying and Brazil ramps up production

AMANDA NELSON

Independent Reporter

Ontario soybean farmers are watching global trade negotiations closely as uncertainty around exports – particularly to China – adds to price pressure in a market already facing strong global crop supplies.

Brazil is expected to have a record soybean harvest in 2026, a development that analysts say will weigh on prices worldwide.

“There’s forecast to be record production in Brazil, and when there’s strong production, that has downward pressure on price,” said Brian Innes, executive director of Soy Canada. “That’s the first thing to watch for prices in 2026. The second is what happens globally with geopolitics and tariffs.”

Innes said changes in trade relations between major economies – especially the United States and China – can have a direct impact on the prices Canadian farmers receive.

“Due to the Trump administration, tariffs on soybeans have changed,” he said. “One thing to watch for in 2026 is how the situation between the U.S. and China evolves, and how the situation between Canada and China evolves. That can have an impact on price if tariffs



(PAUL NELSON PHOTO)

Grant Haven Media reporter Amanda Nelson grew up on a farm in Chesley, two hours north of Perth County. Her mother and father, Elaine and Paul Nelson, still grow soybeans on their 200-acre farm, pictured here.

change.”

More than 70 per cent of Ontario’s soybean crop is exported, with prices shaped by global demand, particularly from China. While China historically sourced much of its soybeans from the United States, it is increasingly turning to Brazil due to generally lower prices.

The Canadian and U.S. soybean markets are also closely linked through

cross-border trade and processing, which could impact prices for Canadian farmers.

“Products flow back and forth across the border,” said Innes. “For example, Ontario soybeans are shipped to Michigan, processed into soybean meal and then shipped back into Ontario. Soybean meal and soybean oil trade back and forth across the border, and that’s why

prices are very linked.”

Soybeans are priced on global benchmarks – particularly U.S. futures markets – meaning Canadian prices move in step with broader world trends.

“The price that Ontario farmers see is based on what conditions Canada faces when exporting to the world, including China,” said Innes. “In the past, the difference between Michigan and Ontario was largely tied to exchange rates, but now, with global trade disruptions, Canada and the U.S. face different tariffs and different market conditions.”

Despite growing competition from lower-cost producers, Innes said Ontario remains well positioned as a high-quality soybean supplier.

Ontario is a global leader in identity-preserved and food-grade soybeans, a niche market that allows farmers to compete on quality rather than volume alone.

“We’re living in a time of unprecedented global uncertainty, and if market conditions change for Canadian soybean exports, that will have an impact on price,” said Innes. “But Canadian soybeans have been flowing under strong export conditions for some time, and that has meant strong demand for Ontario soybeans.”

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FCC renews partnership with Canadian Centre for Agricultural Wellbeing

Partnership to support National Farmer Wellness Network and Crisis Line

CONTRIBUTED

Canadian Centre for Agricultural Wellbeing

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

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

"The response to the National Farmer Wellness Network Crisis Line since its launch has confirmed what we always knew. There is a deep and urgent need for mental-health support that speaks the language of farming," said Canadian Centre for Agricultural Wellbeing CEO and lead scientist Dr. Briana Hagen. "FCC's renewed investment means we can continue building on this foundation, reaching more farmers and agricultural workers who need immediate, culturally informed support. This partnership is about more than a phone line; it's about

ensuring Canada's agricultural community knows it is seen, valued and never alone."

Since launching in February 2025, the National Farmer Wellness Network Crisis Line has connected agricultural workers across Canada with licensed mental-health professionals trained through the Canadian Agricultural Literacy Program (CALP), specialists who understand the unique pressures of farming life. The renewal ensures this vital service continues uninterrupted.

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

Farming remains one of Canada's most demanding occupations. Financial volatility, geographic isolation, unpredictable weather and the emotional weight of caring for land and livestock create compounding mental-health pressures

that general support services are often ill-equipped to address. The NFWN Crisis Line was built specifically to meet farmers where they are, and this renewed commitment ensures it will keep doing so.

"Renewing this commitment means that farmers and farm families across Canada can continue to count on us, not

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



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Can seasonal patterns help inform fertilizer purchasing decisions?

LEIGH ANDERSON

Farm Credit Canada

As producers turn their attention to the 2027 growing season, buying fertilizer remains one of the most important and uncertain crop input decisions.

The return of Chinese fertilizer exports has improved supply prospects for some nutrients, but ongoing geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and the potential for disruptions to trade through the Strait of Hormuz continue to create upside price risk. At the same time, energy markets and global trade flows remain important drivers of fertilizer costs.

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

Fertilizer markets are sending mixed signals

Current market indicators highlight the diverging outlooks for nitrogen and phosphate fertilizers heading into 2027. Urea prices in the U.S. Gulf fertilizer market have retreated significantly from the highs reached earlier in 2026 and now sit roughly 15 per cent below pre-conflict levels, while DAP prices at New Orleans (NOLA) remain approximately 25 per cent above pre-conflict levels. The contrast highlights the different forces shaping nitrogen and phosphate markets. Unlike nitrogen and phosphate, potash prices have remained comparatively stable over the past year.

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

Nitrogen markets easing, but risks remain

Part of the decline in urea prices reflects the seasonal slowdown that follows North American planting, a

period often referred to as the summer lull in fertilizer markets. Prices have also softened due to the return of Chinese urea exports after several years of limited participation in global markets, improving product availability and easing pressure on nitrogen prices.

However, lower nitrogen prices should not be mistaken for lower risk. The Middle East remains a critical supplier of fertilizer products, feedstocks and energy, while the Strait of Hormuz remains a key global trade route. Any disruption to regional trade flows, shipping routes or natural gas markets could quickly reverse recent price declines.

Phosphate markets remain fundamentally tight

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

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

Managing uncertainty through purchasing decisions

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

Nitrogen exhibits the strongest seasonality of the major fertilizers. Over the past five years, Canadian retail prices have typically been the weakest during late summer and fall before strengthening into the spring ap-

plication season, with average values peaking in April and May.

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

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

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

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

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

Bottom line

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

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

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OFA urges farmers to put safety first

CONTRIBUTED

Ontario Federation of Agriculture

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

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

"The farm is more than a workplace, it's also home," said farmer and OFA executive member Paul Maurice. "Safety starts with planning and awareness, not

luck. Taking the time to think through tasks, identify risks and put simple precautions in place can make all the difference in preventing injuries and making sure everyone comes home safely at the end of the day."

Common farm safety risks include long days and fatigue, heavy machinery and moving equipment, time pressure from weather and field conditions, road travel with slow-moving vehicles, multiple people working closely together, or working with animals that can behave unpredictably. When fatigue sets in or distractions creep in, the risk of injury rises quickly.

"Simple actions like wearing high-visibility gear, maintaining equipment,

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

A few top farm safety tips:

- Keep equipment fixed and up to date.
- Take a break when tired or fatigued, and don't cut corners when in a rush.
- Shut down equipment before making adjustments or dislodging a blockage and keep safety guards in place.
- Don't let kids play around work sites or near equipment.
- Have a first aid kit and emergency contact numbers handy and take a charged phone when heading out for the

day.

-When frustration hits because of breakdowns or long hours, take a breath, step back and reassess before moving on.

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

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

To learn more about farm safety, visit agsafetyweek.ca.

National survey of farmer and rancher mental health now open

GRANT HAVEN MEDIA

Staff Contribution

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

The survey is being conducted by the University of Guelph in collaboration

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

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

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

According to the Canadian Centre for Agricultural Wellbeing, broad participation is essential to ensuring the findings

reflect the diverse realities of farming and ranching across Canada to help inform future research, programs and policy.

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

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

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