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From Soil to Market: Town kids sample farm life with Moore Farms Junior Farmers immersion workshops

By Diane Baltaz
Brant-area children aged six to 12 experienced farm life this year thanks to a new “hands-on” exposure program launched by an Ayr area farm.

Moore Farms ran an eight-session workshop series geared at giving urban youth direct experience with multiple aspects of crop and livestock production. The series, entitled From Soil to Market, provided interested youth with “creative exploration and a comprehensive understanding of farm life” said Moore Farms events coordinator Sarah Elliott.

Elliott, a sister to Moore’s Farms’ Nancy Moore, created the series. Assisting in its implementation was Chelsea Howard, a certified yoga instructor with a social services career background. Both women emphasized hands-on learning, and creative experiences for participants while teaching them about agriculture.

“Engage in activities like planting, harvesting and caring for crops,” reads the program’s webpage. “Learn about eco-friendly-farming techniques that provide environmental stewardship. And participate in nature-inspired art projects, blending creativity with agriculture.”

The day-long sessions ran on Fridays, starting with school board PD days in late March, and ended on Aug. 25. Parents paid \$65 per day or a package price. The sessions included snacks and lunch from the Longhorn Smokehouse -- the food truck adjoining the farm’s store.

The series began with the theme Soil, Insects and Compost before moving on to farming innovation, fruit and pollination, vegetables, cereals and grains, poultry and livestock before ending with the Farmers’ Market.



The Junior Farmers began their days with a yoga stretch led by Chelsea Howard, facing, by the bales.

“Each workshop tries to build upon the previous ones,” said Elliott. “Families can enroll in all eight or select specific workshops. We offer hands-on activities such as feeding poultry, grooming livestock and planting vegetables.”

Maximum enrollment was kept at 14 persons for a 1:7 teaching ratio, said Howard. The children arrive by 9 a.m. and depart between 3:30 and 4 p.m.

Although another Brant farm offered a young farmers drop in, Elliott said there was no regional day-long youth farm program.

Elliott used experiences from her childhood, and her previous 17-year career in developmental services, for inspiration.

“I always found myself drawn back to the farm, often bringing the people I supported with me. I witnessed first-hand the calm-

ing and healing power of nature and farm animals,” said Elliott. “It was a place where I could teach and offer behind-the-scenes experiences.”

Elliott’s understanding of the value of farm culture on humans intensified when a knee injury that required extensive rehabilitation increased her time at Moores’. During her convalescence, she imagined ways of blending her love of farming, teaching, and even party planning, into fulfilling work. She pitched the resulting Junior Farmers idea to Nancy and her husband, Alan Moore.

The Moores agreed, and collaborated with Elliott and Howard on program development with the knowledge from a family who farmed the land for 109 years. “Farmer



The Junior Farmers workshops had a maximum of 1:7 teacher-youth ratio with Sarah Elliot, foreground, and Chelsea Howard, back right on wagon.



These Longhorn cows and calves exemplified the routines of caring for livestock at Moore Farms’ Junior Farmers sessions.

From Soil to Market: Town kids sample farm life with Moore Farms Junior Farmers immersion workshops

Al" as he became, shared his knowledge of farming with participants. Nancy supervised the provision of food from the Longhorn Smokehouse and sourced her network of contacts for additional expert speakers.

On the day that Brant Farms dropped in, the 10 Junior Farmers present focused on "farming innovation". This topic covered the history of farming techniques before moving into the future with self-driving tractors and crop innovations.

After settling in with a farm-themed yoga stretch led by Howard, the participants did activities combining learning with play, including watching a video of Farmer Al demonstrating strip tillage in crops. The group was "transported to 1916", the year that the Moore family settled on the land.

The adventure began with a farm tour in the "People Wagon", driven by Farmer Alan. Elliott and Howard pointed out various physical features of the land, soil, and the farm's cash crop and staggered vegetable plantings, making multiple references to other workshops.

They described how the Moores of 1916 plowed the land with horses and establish their cattle herd.

"They had a special relationship with their farm animals as they needed them to grow the land," said Elliott.

The women pointed out common and endangered animal species such as a killdeer, turtles; the wild herbs the 1916 Moores gathered for medicine, the drive shed which protects the equipment, a tree stuck by lightning, and a pile of irrigation pipes.

They even stopped at the family's former dynamite shed. Elliott explained that "the Moore family helped build the infrastructure in nearby communities such as Glen Morris and needed dynamite to do that."

In one field, using plasticized cue cards, the youth peppered Farmer Al with multiple questions such as, "What do you like about farming?" and "How do you know when to water the crop/or when a crop gets too much water?"

When asked, "What is your favourite farming tool and why," Farmer Al replied, "The tractor, but it must be red with a cabin on it and have air conditioning."

When asked about what super-power he wished he could be given as a farmer he replied, "Make it rain on weekends."

At the pasture where the longhorns cows and calves grazed, Elliott pointed out a cow that recently lost its calf, and then described how the many remaining calves would soon be separated from their mothers.

"There will be a big summer pasture for the calves to go into," assured Howard. "But Farmer Al has to keep an eye on them now; and there are two more babies waiting to be born."



Paris resident Ava Mayhew bends over to examine strip tillage used on a field of newly planted zucchini.



Junior Farmers Atticus and Amira practise roping "a steer" during a lunch break at Moore Farms, Ayr.

After lunching outside the Longhorn Smokehouse, the children returned to the barn to learn more about how the Moores lived in 1916. This included a game about animal categories, and they discussed plants' uses on the Moore farm past and present and how wild animals such as the Canada goose once sustained the family.

The innovation day's hands-on activity was the exploration of tractors, including sitting in the driver's seat.

Activities during other days included grinding grain and making farm treats, such as granola to take home, making compost and creating layers of soil, the latter with the use of different types of cereal which they subsequently ate. Plans were also being finalized to bring a cowboy to the livestock day in order to demonstrate how to rope cat-

tle, as well as explain why rodeos "help keep cowboys in practice," said Howard.

"The group is aged under 10 so play-based activities are helpful to understand what they are learning. We try to use adventurous activities because it's almost like a scavenger hunt," said Howard.

"Everything we're creating, or have created, is about immersion-style learning," said Elliott. "The kids learn how much they can do by physically working as a team instead of just using technology."

Youth reaction seemed positive to date, the women said. They added that the oldest boy in the class is "demonstrating a calling to farm, judging by his fascination and behaviour, as opposed to being born and raised into it." 🌱



Moore Farms events coordinator Sarah Elliott checks in with participants during their lunch break.

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.

“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.



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.

Steve Miedema of Townsend Butchers chairs the Simcoe Farmers’ Market committee. Although he also sees new faces and return customers, Miedema said that mar-

ket sales have steadily risen since the pandemic, which shut down retailers in 2020. Many vendors, including himself, switched

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



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

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.

Tim Norris of Orange Door Farm, Mt. Elgin, chairs the Tillsonburg Farmers’ Market, which runs on Saturday mornings from 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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The Hunter Brothers’ national tours deepen their kinship with other farmers across Canada

By Diane Baltaz
Brothers JJ and Dusty Hunter are “born and raised” farmers with what must be one of Canada’s better-known off farm careers.

They’re the two eldest members of the Hunter Brothers, one of Canada’s most successful country music bands. These brothers, along with siblings Luke, Brock and Ty, collected multiple JUNO and CCMA (Canadian Country Music Association) nominations, Fans’ Choice Awards, have 33 million YouTube views, and draw crowds across Canada. They sang to 20,000 fans nightly at the Calgary Stampede’s over 10 nights in 2024.

Their videos are often set on their farm and around Shaunavon (population 1,800), Saskatchewan with songs such as “What Colour Do you Drive?”, “Burning Down the Barn”, “ “Lost”, “Golden Rules” and “Peace, Love and Country Music,” and their smash hit, “Born and Raised”, some of which are certified gold in Canada.

But the Hunter Brothers identify as farm boys first and foremost – four of them farm on the family’s 20,000-acre land near Shaunavon (population 1800) in southwestern Saskatchewan, located 74 kilometers from the Montana border and 110 kilometers from Swift Current. The exception is Ty, who owns a local coffee shop and recently acquired a theater, but he happily talks about how his farm upbringing impacts his life.

On Aug. 30, the Hunter Brothers performed at the Paris Fair, where JJ and Dusty shared their thoughts about farming with Brant Farms.

The brothers are third generation Saskatchewan farmers on their father’s side; fifth generation on their mother’s.

This year they grew chickpeas, flax, canola, canary seed and grain; the grain was “notably” barley and Durham wheat. “This



Brock Hunter practicing during the band’s sound check at the Paris Fair

area is known for its Durham wheat,” added Dusty. The Hunters frequently grow pulses such as lentils, but chose not to do so in 2025.

These crops cover most of the farm’s 20,000 acres, which the brothers say require larger acreages than those in Southern Ontario due to climate. The province has a continental climate characterized by extreme temperatures, low precipitation which mainly falls during the summer and can be variable.

“In Saskatchewan, not many farmers waste the land,” said JJ, adding that part of their farm borders ranchland.

Fans know from their videos that the Hunter’s fields are huge compared to those in Eastern Canada.

“We have a joke about the rumour of someone once seeing a tree on the farm,” said Dusty, laughing, adding that their farm has a few trees, “but it’s not like here in Southern Ontario.”

Farm labour naturally requires that everyone pitches in, but the brothers gravitate towards specific responsibilities.

JJ does much of the spraying, handles many management decisions, and assists Luke who focuses on commodity sales and some finances. Also, according to his brothers, “JJ is very good at breaking things – he breaks things so that Brock (the mechanic) can fix them.”

When he isn’t playing the drums, Dusty “determines the agronomy side of things.” He chooses the seed, the type and amount of inputs, and where to plant the crops. He runs the drill in the spring and enjoys combining.

Luke, the band’s baritone, enjoys driving the grain truck, and using the drill along with handling much of the commodity sales. “Luke and Dad are the jacks of all trades on the farm,” said Dusty.

Fans already know that Brock flies the crop duster that appears in many of their videos, in addition to being the farm’s primary mechanic.

Their father, Lorne, now 70, remains “very involved with the farm”, participates in financial decisions and other tasks, especially when the brothers are on tour. They said that their mother, Norma, “used to do everything Dad asked her to do,” but now focuses on other activities such as

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'If there were no farmers, the world would be in trouble': Dusty Hunter



Dusty Hunter (left) and brother JJ behind the stage at the Paris Fair.

baking – especially sourdough -- and singing in a choir.

The Hunters employ six full-time people who are especially helpful when the brothers are on tour.

The drought which affected approximately 71 per cent of Canada formed the basis of what Dusty called "a strange crop year."

"We were initially 'caught up' in the drought," said Dusty. "Then we got late rains. That put us in a weird position after taking off our Durham wheat because the other crops began to re-grow."

"First, it was so dry and then so wet – it's something that our father or other older farmers haven't seen before," added JJ. "Last year it was so dry that we finished harvest by September and this year we've barely started."

Irregular weather patterns complicate the setting of dates for their music gigs, which often require travel. The Hunters try to work around planting and harvest schedules as best as they can. Balancing farm duties with music is challenging, although Dusty said that past experience provides "rough guidelines" for timing certain activities.

"We are juggling the two, and we try to be as fluid as possible," said Dusty. "But as you know, farming is not when you want to do it but when you need to do it."

There is a plus side to this balancing act according to JJ. "We embrace this fact as a part of our story—the fans get it. Our farming connects to the people: if we say that we were on the combine until 11 p.m. last night before flying out to come here, they connect with it."

So why do they still farm?

"Our roots are there," answered JJ.

"It's a way of life," said Dusty. "I have a young family to raise and we live in a small town. It provides for our kids as well, al-

though sometimes farming is a challenging way to make a living. There are easier ways, but it's a solid way -- we have land to walk on and we supply food for the world."

"If there was no music, the human race would continue, but if there were no farmers, the world would be in trouble," added Dusty.

But then there are commodity prices in a world with changing economic outlooks, something that JJ said the five brothers discussed while en route to Brant County.

"What's interesting about farming right now are the rising grocery prices but we as farmers are getting lower prices," said Dusty. "It's strange how a loaf of bread uses the same amount of wheat, but the price of it rises substantially.... Yet farming is an industry that you love doing."

Both brothers laud developments in farm technology such as new tillage methods and crop mapping micro-nutrients within fields for improving agriculture and reducing input costs. The prairie practice of only farming half of one's land and leaving the balance in summer fallow have yielded to new methods of building up organic matter.

"Farming is going in a healthier direction with technological advancements, although technology still has its drawbacks," said Dusty. "We are farming better than ever before."

They laughed when asked about their impressions of Ontario farms.

"It's better land; you've better rain here!" said JJ. "Farming is so different out this way; the farms are so much smaller. Out west, farms must be bigger as input costs are going through the roof, we need more land to spread out the risk over the acres."

Their trans-Canadian tours widened their boundaries of living in a farm community.

JJ admitted to previously believing the mainstream media stereotype of southern



The Hunter Brothers practised their hits during the sound check at the Paris Fair.

Ontario as consisting of large cities, notably Toronto. But a stay at a farm outside Toronto during a promotional event early in their career changed that.

"We saw that there is a whole community like us – we've got a kinship on the farming side and on the music side," said JJ. "It's small town --we're hitting a greater group of people here, compared to the perception that Western Canada is the farming area of the nation. We learned this through our music exposures. Our music gives us travel opportunities and see places that we wouldn't have otherwise."

"We feel a kinship with Ontario and the rest of Canada, which is why we like the fair venue," said Dusty. "Before coming here, I googled the Paris Fair and said, 'Hey! We're going to be with our people!' here's something about coming to a fair to perform."

"I feel blessed to be involved in two different industries that are very different from each other. We share in one that is misunderstood; therefore, I am glad about being able to talk about it. We do take much pride in being part of the task of feeding the world and one bringing hope and joy to another," concluded Dusty.

Before returning home, the Hunter Brothers were scheduled to appear in the TV show, Family Feud in Toronto after the Paris concert. 🍀

—“
"It's a way of life," said Dusty. "I have a young family to raise and we live in a small town."
 —”

Larry Davis brings ingenuity to farming

By Tamara Botting

When Ag Day returned to Hagersville on June 6 as part of the town's 150th anniversary celebrations, Larry Davis was there for the opening ceremonies, giving the official proclamation as town crier.

It's just one of the many roles he's taken on over the years to give back – on both the small and larger scale.

Davis is the third generation of his family to farm at the current location on Bishopsgate Road in Brant.

"We moved here from another farm in the county. The farmstead before our generation was on Tutela Heights Road, just down the road from Alexander Graham Bell. So, I tell people my grandfather and Alexander would have been buddies," Davis said with a chuckle.

"Dad said that farm was so hilly that sometimes they would upset the wagon and the horses on the hills. So, they were looking for another farm and settled here. It's still quite hilly, but it's not as bad as it is over on Tutela Heights."

Davis primarily farms hay, as well as miscanthus.

The latter has been an outlet for a lot of creative ingenuity and experimentation for Davis.

"When the government wanted to get rid of coal burning systems in Ontario, some farmers said, we can grow a crop for you that you can burn, and it's renewable – every year, we'll have a new crop," Davis said, adding that miscanthus is sustainable and good for the environment, as it's carbon sequestering – it absorbs carbon dioxide.

While it looked promising at first, the government ultimately changed course in its approach, and the idea of using miscanthus as an alternative fuel source largely fell to the wayside. There are, however, some companies in the United States that have been

using the plant to make pellets for fire; it's also being looked at as a possible fibre filler for pet food.

"So, we were left with this crop, and we've looked for other uses for it," Davis said.

The main use he and his wife, Sally Davis, have found for it is as garden bedding.

"It makes an excellent mulch

around trees, rather than using wood chips or tree bark," he said.

Sally said anecdotally, they've noticed that, "There's something in it that prevents things from germinating in it. When you put down a wood or bark mulch, or any kind of mulch, the helicopters (seeds) will land in it, or dandelions seed will land in it; they'll germinate and grow. It doesn't seem to do that



Innovation has been the cornerstone of Larry Davis' approach to farming. One example of this is the experimentation he's done to investigate various uses of miscanthus, particularly when it comes to soil improvements.

in miscanthus. And there's no seeds in it, like there is in wheat straw or rye straw."

In Davis' experience, it's also a good additive for soil, helping to better strike that elusive balance of good drainage and moisture retention. He said it even works on clay-heavy soil.

A few years ago, he was hired to manage a marijuana farm. The soil was so hard that he and the workers couldn't put a stake in it to hold the plants; he had to use an electric drill to put holes in the soil, and even then, "we were burning out the drills."

The following year, Davis said, "I put down a layer – and I mean a layer – of miscanthus around the marijuana plants; that soil completely changed, just like that."

He said the rain would soak into the soil instead of running off, and "We didn't have to irrigate."

Davis said this experimental approach is nothing new for him.

"I've always been innovative like that," he said, always "trying to find new ways to farm."

While it's a hot topic today, back in the '60s and '70s, soil erosion wasn't on the radar for as many people in the agricultural industry, Davis said. It was an issue he had to contend with regularly, though.

"This farm was highly erodible, because it's sandy," Davis said. The soil would "blow away in the winds and wash away when it rained. And that wasn't good. ... If it rained, we'd have big washouts, and I would rent an earth mover to drag the soil back up on the hills. And we left a lot of grass in the waterways."

At the time, they were using a moldboard plow, because that's what everyone was using.

"But there was something wrong with that," Davis said.

When he heard about Glencoe soil savers, which only worked up a narrow strip of soil, he decided to give that a try instead. After he found one to buy in Dunnville and brought it home, "We started using that, and the soil started to change almost immediately."

The shift from conventional till to minimal till, and now no-till in some areas "has helped build the soil here immensely. It has changed so much since the 1970s."

Armed with first-hand experience, Davis tries to advocate for better farming practices, and does what he can to educate other farmers about things like minimal and no-till farming, as well as the benefits of miscanthus.

He does a lot of this work through the Brant Soil and Crop Improvement Association, where he's a board member and past president; he's also currently a board member of the Golden Horseshoe Soil and Crop Improvement Association, which encompasses Niagara, Haldimand, Norfolk, Brant, etc. He's been named a champion hay grower in both associations several times, lending credence to the wealth of knowledge he's built up over the years.

He still likes to explore new options, too.

Recently, the family had some hives put on their property in partnership with Hammer Hives.

"I'm looking to grow that partnership with them, to where I'll own some of the bees," Davis said, noting that their daughter, Melissa, was quite interested in bees, "and I've always been interested in them because I had a cousin who was one of the largest beekeepers in Ontario."

As much as there's benefit in following in the footsteps of others, Davis also knows that a key component in innovation is being willing to sacrifice tradition, and not falling into the trap of doing things a certain way because that's how they've always been done.

When Davis first took over the family farm, there was a dairy operation. Almost immediately, he looked for ways to optimize resources.

Sally noted, "We were collecting all the paper and cardboard from the community and using it as bedding, so we saved it from the landfill."

That wasn't the only environmentally friendly practice that was implemented at that time, she noted.

Davis set up a system where the water was recycled four times before it went out to the land.

Sally explained, "We used the water to cool the milk, and that water was then used to water the cows and clean the milkers. The water used to clean the milkers went into another tank, which was used to clean the floor of the (milking) parlor, and then that water



Larry Davis a key volunteer with various farm groups

went into another tank, which got mixed in with manure to make liquid manure.”

Davis noted, “I even got an innovation award for that.”

More gratifying, though, was seeing a number of other farmers adopting similar systems in their own milking parlours.

Eventually, they had to give up the dairy operation because there was tingle voltage on the farm, and it was impacting the cows’ production.

But even though they don’t have the cows now, Davis can and does still share the knowledge he’s gained over his lifetime of working in agriculture.

He’s been involved with Bite of Brant for many years, and has been a guest speaker at the school where his daughter teaches.

After his most recent visit, “He came home and said the Grade 3/ 4 class didn’t know that McDonald’s hamburgers came from cows,” Sally said.

That’s why Davis sees his role as an agricultural educator as so important.

“They don’t realize the connection between food and agriculture, and between food and our soils,” he said.

It’s not just kids, either; far too many adults have lost the sense that “Everything connects to the soil,” Davis said. “There are

so many aspects of agriculture that the consumer does not understand; they have no conception.”

There are some bright spots of hope, though.

Davis is involved with Farm and Food Care Ontario, and one of big things the group is focusing on now is equipping farmers and others in the agriculture sector on how to give an ‘elevator pitch’ – an engaging speech that’s under a minute – on the importance of agriculture and why farmland needs to be protected.

On top of the other associations he’s a part of, Davis has been a board director for the Ontario Federation of Agriculture for many years, and with the group, has done a lot of work to lobby for good policies for agriculture in Ontario. Davis was just re-elected to that position. At all levels of government in Canada, he has seen that there are politicians who either come from an agricultural background, or have an awareness of the industry.

It can be slow work, but Davis, like any other farmer, knows that sometimes it takes time for things to grow.

If he ever needs a reminder, he can look to the trees.

“I have planted thousands of trees,” Davis said. These were planted primarily as wind-breaks, intended to stop the spread of ‘snoil’ – snow that’s mixed with soil as it’s blown across the fields. When he stands on his front lawn, almost all of the trees he can see when he looks in any direction are ones he planted.

Besides that, “I have a nice forest that I maintain,” Davis said. The woodlot is just over 100 acres, and he uses the dead trees as firewood to heat everything on the farm.

The woodlot is home to several species at risk, including Blanding’s turtles, Canada warblers, and eastern wood pewees.

Davis has also worked with the American Chestnut Foundation to help reintroduce the natural American chestnut to Ontario.

“That’s another species at risk that I have naturally in my forest,” he said.

Initially, there was just one, but after Davis contacted the University of Guelph, they brought a dozen more, which were all planted near the existing one. While two had suffered a bit of damage from deer eating at them, “the rest are thriving.”

Hopefully, with help from dedicated advocates like Davis, the Ontario agricultural industry will follow suit. 🌱



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Brant Woodlot Owners Association: make new friends, love trees, sequester carbon and boost your income



BWOA executive members John Moffat and Nancy Van Sas in a re-treed former pasture on Moffat's farm.



From above, this tall oak tops the canopy on Moffat's managed bush.

By Diane Baltaz

Utilizing strategic woodlot management techniques rather than leaving your treed areas "to nature" can provide greater pleasure and income, insist two farmers affiliated with the Brant Woodlot Association (BWOA).

Brant Woodlot president Nancy Van Sas of Kelvin and fellow executive committee member John Moffat of Onondaga Town-line Road are two tree-savvy farmers who mentor woodlot owners about the benefits of healthy woodlots – and the social benefits of joining the BWOA.

"Woodlot associations attract many experienced members who willingly share

advice," said Van Sas. "They attract many great, knowledgeable people to our board."

Says the BWOA website: "We are a group of men and women in Haldimand, Brant, Hamilton, and beyond, who are passionate about trees and woods. We have a lot of shared knowledge and experience of species, habitats, responsible harvesting, and tree health."

The Brant group is one of 21 chapters affiliated with the Ontario Woodlot Association (OWA) – the not-for-profit, grassroots stewardship organization which promotes restoration, woodlot management and advocates for healthy forest ecosystems. It

includes both woodlot owners and individuals, forestry professionals and organizations that support its goals.

"We encourage people who are interested in trees and wildlife corridors (the elongated naturally vegetated parts of landscape that allows animals to move from one habitat to another)," said Moffat.

The OWA defines a woodlot as "any private or community-owned tract of land including all woodlands, wetlands and forest-forming habitats." They use the term, "forest" to describe the larger treed landscape.

The OWA website states that the average member's woodlot size is 20 hectares, with tree types ranging from hardwood forests to Christmas tree plantings, and other variations in between.

Many Brant members express a special interest in Carolinian tree species due to the county's location in the Carolinian forest zone with tree species unique to Canada, such as pawpaw and sassafras. But a glance at this chapter's workshops and field trips indicates a diversified range of forestry information.

Past field trips, held during spring and autumn, include nursery and sawmill tours, unique treescapes, members' woodlots and even an oak whiskey barrel maker near St. George.

Some, like the association's tour of Ruthven near Cayuga, are combined with the BWOA's annual general meeting which is held each autumn; Van Sas said that this arrangement enabled members to learn from the site's forestry officials in addition to exploring this historic natural woodland site.

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Members also receive issues of the OWA quarterly, *The Ontario Woodlander*, which Moffat insisted “is worth the \$50 plus tax registration fee alone.” There’s access to agroforestry and carbon offset programs, a woodlot buy and sell site, and notices about woodlot tours elsewhere Ontario, where different farming conditions and cropping practices require other forms of tree stewardship.

Besides tours, networking and knowledge sharing, members also enjoy landowner education programs and notifications on topics such as carbon sequestration, invasive species alerts. Local workshops cover topics such as woodlot safety with professional instruction on the proper use of chainsaw; recently, a Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA) official taught proper pruning techniques that won’t invite disease through improper pruning.

“You basically leave the farm to learn from other people, see other woodlots and take this info back to your farm,” said Moffat.

“We hold the trips during the season’s shoulders – spring and fall – when farmers are freer to get involved,” said Van Sas, adding that the tours attract people of all ages and mobility levels, including OWA members from other chapters.

Moffat and Van Sas’s own farms and professional careers demonstrate how property owners can glean ideas for their own land.

Fourteen years ago, Moffat and his wife, Sharon, became the fourth owners of their 150-year old farm, located near the south-east corner of Brant County within eyesight of the edge of the Ontario Green Belt in Hamilton.

“We’re either the first or last farm you see when you enter or leave Brant County, depending which way you approach it.”

The farm was previously a dairy farm until 1994 and had bush and fields bordered with hedgerows, but Moffat, who grew up on a nearby farm on Book Road, Ancaster, cash crops hay, soybeans and wheat.

Also, after graduating from university with a biology degree, Moffat had an extensive tree-related career including the Royal Botanical Gardens and the Halton Conservation Authority. Therefore, since 2013 Moffat planted 5,000 trees throughout the farm, “seeking diversity of species – mainly Carolinian.” He planted trees in an old cattle pasture near the barn, in the woods, hedgerows, and in agriculturally unproductive areas, reforesting approximately 20-plus acres of land.

As part of the process, Moffat worked with organizations such as the GRCA and completed an Environmental Farm Plan with the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (OCSIA) – an OCSIA member sign hangs with his OWA sign by the roadside. He credits gaining additional knowledge from veteran BWOA executive member and former past president Neil Dunning, a professed “forest enthusiast” who issues the



John Moffat and Nancy Van Sas at the base of a large oak in Moffat’s sustainably managed bush.

Brant group’s monthly e-letter and doubles as their primary pipeline with the OWOA.

Moffat’s plantings link with a neighbour’s woodlot to create wildlife corridor between both farms. Ornithologists have confirmed sightings of endangered or at risk species on the farm including red headed woodpeckers, bluebirds, three pairs of wood ducks and bobolinks.

Moffat previously hosted a BWOA tour; he demonstrated the use of his portable saw mill which he uses to selectively cut trees, and an outdoor wood-burning furnace which heats his 1800s farmhouse. He also produces charcuterie boards, showing members an additional means of making income from one’s bush and celebrating local forest-made products.

“My advice is to plant as many trees you think you can manage and according to the conditions – in heavily grassed areas you’ll want taller trees at least a meter high for watering and management,” said Moffat.

Van Sas assists her family in running a cash crop-broiler operation near Kelvin “in that part of Brant that lies within the Long Point Conservation Area Authority.”

She also works with the OSCIA where she runs stewardship workshops and works with farmers in to assess their farm operations for environmental concerns and cost-sharing opportunities. Van Sas’s day job informs her family’s woodlot management decisions.

“The OSCIA workbook has a chapter on woodlots; there’s farmer input to make you think about it differently,” said Van Sas. “The course advises you to not just leave it to nature.”

In her case, a forester assessed their woodlot and sustainably removed trees providing an additional \$47,000 of income.

“If you manage your woodlot you get healthier trees and a steadier income,” said Van Sas. “It’s also good to leave some dead trees for species at risk—bats and woodpeckers – you still allow light to get in for the other trees.”

The Van Sas family has a “wish list” of two reforestation projects which they hope to do in 2026. One involves extending marginal farmland near their pond into a wetland as equipment does not pass well there; a three-acre triangle of marginal land located near a hydro line will be reforested as an income source for the next generation.

“A woodlot can be a production area if it is actively managed with proper cutting,” added Van Sas. “Also deer will more likely remain in the woodlot for feeding and wildlife is attracted for your personal enjoyment.”

These two woodlot advocates describe themselves as “care takers of life” which they see as a critical agrarian duty in this time of climate change and erratic weather conditions.

“Farmers serve as carbon caretakers with properly managed woodlots serving as carbon sinks,” said Van Sas. “You don’t need to farm every last acre—marginal lands can be put into trees.”

Added Moffat, “Yes, big farm equipment exists on farms, but the parameters and hedgerows can serve other purposes; studies show that a field’s parameters provide more protection for the crop if they are treed.”

Moffat mentioned a study which demonstrated how strategically planted and managed trees such as black walnut can provide “high income when harvested after 45 years” providing income for the farm’s next generation.

Brant Woodlot Owners Association: make new friends, love trees, sequester carbon and boost your income

“That creates the mindset for sustainable farming for children,” said Moffat. “They have the enjoyment of trees when they are small but potentially they can become a revenue stream for them.”

Consequently, when required, the Brant Woodlot Owners advocate with Brant County on topics such as the municipal tree bylaw and the Community Forestry Strategy; a county council representative at their meetings.

“We’re moving towards making changes on farms whether we want to or not,” said Van Sas. “We need to be sustainable, sequester carbon and that involves woodlots too.”

“With climate change we experience more moisture issues and we risk erosion when trees are removed from hedgerows,” added Van Sas. “We might get more plants in the field but there’s also less moisture; you end up giving your soil to the neighbours. That’s also part of the OSCIA – with farmers working for farmers.”

“We need trees to breathe,” concluded Nancy. “We’re learning in a time of change.”

Van Sas referred to the 2024 the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry report, entitled Critical Ground, which highlights soil’s impact on Canada’s multiple ecosystem services.

“If we continue farming the way we are now, how are we going to eat? Already California has water issues. If we cut down trees we will have less moisture; maybe we can consider what our parents did 100 years ago, adopting sustainable practices that can work even on today’s large farms.” 🌿



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Paris Fair volunteer makes 2025 Canadian Association of Fairs and Exhibitions Top 10 under-40 honour roll

By Diane Baltaz

Sydney Adams, 26, a director-at-large on the Paris Agricultural Society (PAS), has won national recognition for her years of volunteerism.

The Canadian Association of Fairs and Exhibitions (CAFÉ) named Adams as one of their Top 10 under 40 Honourees – a national recognition highlighting people aged under 40 for their leadership and enthusiasm for Canadian fairs.

Adams, who is the fifth generation of her family living on LynTrail Estate near Brantford, has volunteered with the fair since the age of 10. She served as a board director for five years prior to joining the PAS executive, and now chairs the gates committee.

Two years ago, Adams led a pivotal governance review and revision of the PAS's constitution to guarantee its compliance with Ontario's Not-for-Profit Corporations Act, balancing legal alignment with the preservation of the society's mission and values. The agricultural society voted to accept the final document on Oct. 23, 2024, prior to the province's deadline.

The PAS announcement about Adams' national honour stated: "Her supportive leadership empowers volunteers and ensures a positive experience for fairgoers and team



Sydney Adams.

members alike. Sydney constantly leads by example, demonstrating a strong work ethic, clear communication, and an exceptional ability to bring people together."

The CAFÉ announcement added, "She brings a powerful blend of compassion and capability to every role she takes on", concluding that she models "the next generation of fair leaders."

The eldest of four sisters, Adams began volunteering at the Paris Fair when her father, Brad, chaired the gates committee. She assisted her dad in performing minor tasks.

"Those were the days that I had to align the dollar bills so that they were facing the right way before anyone could take the money to the bank," she said. Adams also participated in fair competitions in her youth, entering crafts, fruits and vegetables.

At age 20, Adams joined the fair board as a junior director for interested youth under age 25 before moving to the executive as a director-at-large.

"I enjoy being involved with the community here, in Paris – we're a close-knit group and we work well to run the fairgrounds. It's a year-round position, but of course, the fair is the biggest event."

Adams works as a grief and bereavement counselor and art therapist at the Stedman Community Hospice in Brantford, and helps out with general maintenance around Lyntrail Estate when she can – the farm is currently cash cropped by extended family. 🌱

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Dr. Thomas Molnar ‘rocks the stage’ at annual hazelnut symposium



Dr. Thomas Molnar of Rutgers University was the keynote speaker at the 16th Annual Ontario Hazelnut Association symposium.



Linda Grimo, of Grimo Nut Nursery in Niagara-on-the-Lake, has Rutgers EFB-resistant varieties on offer.

By Jeff Tribe

The Ontario Hazelnut Association was thrilled to have an industry rock star take the stage for its 16th Annual Symposium and AGM Thursday, March 20 at the University of Guelph Arboretum.

Dr. Thomas Molnar is the American equivalent of Niagara-on-the-Lake's Ernie Grimo, godfathers of eastern North American hazelnut breeding in their own right. As the child of a single mother, Molnar lived with his grandfather who retired from Princeton Nurseries in New Jersey, growing up surrounded by plants. Molnar eventually moved to rural Pennsylvania, working for area farmers and spending his free time in the woods, honing his interest in things biological.

"I found plants and a passion."

Following his freshman at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP), Molnar connected with Dr. Reed Funk or Rutgers University through his Aunt Barbara, who worked in the Rutgers Dean's office at the time, responding to Thomas's request for a summer job with one of the plant scientists there.

"She picked the best one for sure," smiled Molnar.

Funk's successful turfgrass breeding program had earned his university a lot of money, and the professor latitude to pursue projects of his interest. Based in part on the health benefits of nut consumption, the internationally-recognized expert in plant breeding initiated a program featuring several nut varieties. Molnar worked with Funk for three summers before transferring to Rutgers to finish his undergraduate de-

gree, with the specific plan of working with his mentor, ultimately toward a Ph.D.

Molnar earned his bachelor's degree in plant science in 2000, adding a Ph.D. in plant biology in 2006. Inspired through the opportunity to work with and learn from a true master eventually as an assistant, Molnar's longer-term considerations shifted from possibly becoming a doctor or veterinarian. He quickly became more deeply invested in the breeding program, eventually taking it over upon Funk's retirement and shifting its focus exclusively to hazelnuts, specifically breeding trees which could form the basis of a viable eastern seaboard industry.

"I was young and that was exciting for me," said Molnar. "I was at the right place at the right time with the right interests."

What he may not have recognized at the time was a 30-plus-year commitment that far more than just a job, would at times represent a seven-day-a-week passion, as noted by his wife, a science teacher, and their three children. Molnar's approach is in part based upon his youthful realization life was short.

"I didn't want to pass through and not make an impact."

In broad terms, hazelnut breeders seek to produce vigorous trees yielding large quantities of round, high-quality nuts which blanch well; compatible genes for climate-appropriate pollination; and the number one consideration, Eastern Filbert Blight (EFB) resistance, high levels both in terms of strength and diversity.

The fungal disease is a threat because commercially-viable nut trees are imported from other parts of the world, coming into

North America without the generational resistance native hazelnut trees - with nuts too small to build an industry around - have built up over millennia. Accelerating that process through selective breeding is still time-consuming and exhaustive. Choosing the best of the best of the best from thousands of test trees (8,000 annually at Rutgers) exhibiting resistance and positive characteristics, evaluation trials, wider testing in various locations and then propagating the eventual winners into large-enough numbers to make an industry impact takes 17 to 20 years.

"You can see it's a long process," said Molnar, describing it as a 'numbers game.' The more specimens breeders are able to cycle through, the more likely they are to find 'those rare individuals' moving the effort forward.

His approach seeks quantitative resistance, stacking tolerance genes rather than breeding for a single fungal resistance gene, due to the fact EFB has shown the ability to evolve.

An overall EFB battle plan includes factors like nurseries ensuring their material is clean, growers scouting for, removing and destroying affected tissue, orchards being managed as multi-stem trees in order to be able to remove one 'branch', diverse plantings encompassing a range of resistance, and if required, a spraying program. However, plant breeding is a crucial first step.

"How do we make it work, long-term?" Molnar asked rhetorically. "How do we help the industry really get started and be sustainable and viable?"

His answer to his own questions is 'resistance and diversity of resistance sources', quantitative if you will, a goal certainly not culminating, but celebrating an important milestone in 2020 with the release of four varieties: Raritan, Somerset, Monmouth and

"For almost 30 years, that wasn't the case. I think we have the plants to do it and the know-how, we just have to make it come together."

Hazelnut breeding pioneer speaks at symposium

Hunterdon. By this year, they are available in sufficient numbers and accessible to growers.

"For almost 30 years, that wasn't the case," said Molnar. "I think we have the plants to do it and the know-how, we just have to make it come together."

Five other varieties are also on tap for release in 2026, part of what Molnar describes as an ongoing life's work, visible in growing eastern North American hazelnut acreage. In his home state of New Jersey, for example, from virtually nothing, voluntary respondents to a survey representing only a partial total of what is actually out there, indicate 34 producers have 20,271 trees planted on 101.5 acres. This represents a significant percentage of totals from 20 eastern states (147 producers, 41,672 trees).

"There's momentum in the east to develop a hazelnut industry," Molnar said. "We're close, it's almost at that commercial level but we're not there yet so I kind of have to be patient."

Deeply committed for close to 30 years, Molnar is determined to see a program representing both his reputation and life's work through.

"If you really care about what you're doing, you put yourself out there," he concluded. "How the trees perform, how they're going to impact other people's lives.

"It's very personal."

Four new EFB-resistant Rutgers University hazelnut varieties available in Canada

Help is on the way for Ontario hazelnut growers in the form of four new Eastern Filbert Blight-resistant varieties developed through Dr. Thomas Molnar's breeding program at Rutgers University, in New Jersey.

"You can get them into Canada," said Molnar, of availability both at Grimo Nut Nursery in Niagara-on-the-Lake and the Foggy Bottom Nursery in New Jersey.

First released in 2020, the cultivars became available in 2024. Five more varieties are expected to be released in 2026, with details on each becoming available at that time.

Raritan

Raritan is a high-yielding tree with quantitative Eastern Filbert Blight (EFB) resistance that produces medium-sized round kernels. It is not EFB immune says Molnar, but highly resistant with cankers that tend to be small. It is not expected to need to be sprayed, however regular scouting for infected areas, and their removal, is recommended.

Trees exhibit vigorous upright growth Molnar continued, Raritan being a robust variety that is comparatively easy to grow.

In New Jersey, it blooms early to mid-season, with S-alleles 3 and 22, S3 expressed in its pollen.

Nuts have a dark-brown shell, typically dropping at maturity in the first half of September. Kernels average 1.2 to 1.5 grams and fit Ferrero Roche specifications said Molnar.

A large tree, it takes time to grow, but is considered the highest producer at maturity, one 19-year test specimen producing over 50 pounds of nuts in one year.

Somerset

Somerset exhibits compact growth says Molnar, their 15-foot height roughly two-thirds the size of Raritan trees, but far more precocious, bearing heavily while young.

It was free of EFB during trials, and produces thin-shelled, round nuts, 54 per cent of which are considered to be kernels of 1.14 grams in weight. They typically fall in mid-September, a timeline aligning with Raritan.

Its dark, green leaves are slightly crinkled. Trees bloom in early to mid-season in New Jersey, with S-alleles 3 and 10, emitting S3 S-alleles in its pollen.

Kernels are 'moderately-good' at blanching, suitable for confectionary and baked options, along with eating as nuts, particularly when roasted.

Monmouth

Monmouth is considered highly-EFB tolerant says Molnar.

Exhibiting moderately-vigorous growth, it is a 'wide spreader' reaching 20 feet and producing 1.19-gram kernels on average from thin shells, at roughly a 50 per cent kernel-to-shell ratio.

Yields are lower in some years than Raritan and Somerset said Molnar. The variety flowers early, which may limit yields because pollenizer schedules may not line up in some years. Monmouth has S-alleles 1 and 12, expressing both in its pollen.

Nuts drop in the first half of September, and while a significant portion do so in the husk, they are comparatively-easily removed either mechanically or by hand.

Hunterdon

Featuring the sweetest kernels of the four hazelnuts, Hunterdon is a moderately high-yielding tree with mostly round, medi-

um to large kernels weighing in at an average of 1.23 grams. Trees show slightly more vigorous growth than Monmouth, spreading more than Raritan and reaching around 20 feet at 15 years of age. It has a high level of EFB tolerance.

Its nuts are brown and shiny, tending to drop in mid-to-late August and onward. This can lead to inconsistent yields due to predators concentrating on nuts available two weeks ahead of anything else.

Based on longer-term crop studies, Molnar no longer recommends Hunterdon as a main crop producer as yields are lower than Raritan, Somerset and Monmouth.

Hunterdon has S-alleles 1 and 3, blooming in early to mid-season and emitting S3 in its pollen.

The Beast

The Beast received its nickname for vigorous and productive growth in early research trials, holding up well to EFB testing.

A hybrid developed from an Oregon State University variety crossed with Slate, it originated at Oregon State. It has been tested since 2000 at Rutgers and released in 2020.

Trees grow upright, reaching 20 feet and spreading moderately. Nuts typically fall in the second half of September. The tree is high-yielding, although nuts are smaller and with a high level of fibre, removed during roasting.

Although initially suggested as a pollenizer in New Jersey, its high level of production, combined with cold hardiness, have led some producers to consider it a main production variety.

"It's a decent kernel," said Molnar. "It is very productive, not as high a yield as Raritan, but a vigorous tree."

The Beast has S-alleles 8 and 23, expressing S8 during early to mid-season pollination. 🌿

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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.

"I hated those apple trees," he admitted, a negative association formed by being the 'young guy' sent up to pick from the highest limbs, he and his brother spraying with a 50-foot hose attached to a 45-gallon drum on a three-point hitch.

"We'd get covered in the product of the day."

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."



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 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 McCredito 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."

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." 🌱



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Going up...cycled: Researchers, entrepreneurs seek to build upcycled food community in Canada

By Luke Edwards

There are millions of dollars worth of food being left in fields and silos, granaries and processing facilities across the country.

And a small but growing group of researchers and business people are developing ways to turn that wasted product into viable business opportunities while also supporting food security. Nearly 100 of them met last month at a Canadian Upcycling Networking meeting hosted by Vineland Research and Innovation Centre.

Upcycling has a niche role in several industries and refers to using items that many would assume is waste and creating something of value from them. In the world of food, that means taking ingredients that otherwise wouldn't be used for human consumption, and using it to create something new.

Examples include turning spent grains into fermentable sugars and plant-based proteins, creating a prebiotic, gut-health powder from resistant starch found in potatoes, or anything in between.

"We want to be part of a system that wastes less," said Lara Ramdin, a board member for the Upcycled Food Association, a global organization with members from 14 different countries.

She cited a statistic that suggests \$58 million of food is wasted in Canada each year. Finding ways to reduce that waste and use those products for something good not only is a potential revenue source for clever entrepreneurs, but can help increase food security nationally and abroad.

Ramdin said if no food in this country was wasted, there'd be enough to provide food insecure Canadians with three meals a day for 300 days.

"We can do more with less," said Ramdin, adding the world is "poised for a significant acceleration in the upcycled movement."

However, significant challenges remain. Chief among them is consumer perception and behaviour. Despite consumers becoming more aware of food costs, Ramdin said the evidence suggests it isn't leading to less waste. Instead, consumers are opting for cheaper brands while still wasting just as much as they always have.

That creates an added challenge for those selling upcycled foods, because shoppers are increasingly wary.

"They're not going to take a chance on a product that's utilizing something they're not sure of," she said.

For years the food industry convinced shoppers "that food grows in a straight line," Ramdin said. Strawberries were all the exact same shape and colour, every loaf of bread came out of the oven looking identical to the one before it. That created an unrealistic understanding of food.

Now, those interested in reducing waste - like people in the upcycled sector - need to "convert the public's mindset," said Doug Alexander, vice president of sustainability and government relations with the Belmont Food Group. He was one of four people to participate in a panel discussion at the meeting.

"When I see the kind of food waste I do... it bothers me. I want to do the right thing," he said.

A key group that needs to be a part of that public perception conversion, said many in attendance, are the retailers. Until shelves are stocked with upcycled food items, it'll be an uphill battle.

But it also requires work and collaboration among those in the sector. For instance, Ramdin said the messaging is vital. She referenced one company that began talking about "rescuing nutrition" in its marketing. That reframing helped convince consumers to give it a try.

Another example is a Canadian company Solnul, which has a line of gut health products created using resistant starch from potatoes. The company came armed with clinical studies and led their marketing with the potential benefits from their products.

"The upcycling story came afterwards," Ramdin said.

Public perception and consumer behaviour aren't the only hurdles to overcome, however. Canada's size can make supply chain issues a challenge, and small start-ups struggle with funding, access to research, confusion over regulatory requirements, and larger companies who can dominate the space.



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Going up...cycled: Researchers, entrepreneurs seek to build upcycled food community in Canada

Some solutions to those issues can be found in collaboration, several in attendance said, and which was one of the main goals of the meeting.

"I was excited to hear how much interest there was in collaboration," said Alexandra Grygorczyk, a research scientist at VRIC who was a speaker and discussion panel moderator at the event.

Throughout the day she heard several conversations among the attendees that unlocked potential solutions to issues they were facing. A sure sign of success was the fact there was no rush when they broke for lunch, because many people were deep in conversation.

"Seeing them connect was very gratifying," she said.

Grygorczyk and the team of organizers will now generate a report based on what was discussed and figure out next steps as they work to develop an upcycled food network in Canada.

That's something Ramdin said she'd like to see. She said there was a limited response from Canada when the UFA hosted a scientific symposium earlier this year. Fortunately, it was so popular elsewhere they're planning a second online symposium in the fall, on Sept. 17.

The UFA was created in 2019 by a group of upcycled food businesses. A non-profit

organization, it now has members in 14 countries across the globe and has created an up-cycled certification program. Now in its third evolution, the third-party process is meant to instill consumer confidence in upcycled products.

VRIC received funding from the CIFST Food Cluster and the Ontario Agri-Food Innovation Alliance (a collaboration between the Government of Ontario and the University of Guelph) to support knowledge translation and transfer within the food upcycling industry.

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Small is beautiful and sustainable at P and Ks Farm in South Brant

By Diane Baltaz

Kune Kune pigs, Katadin and Barbados Black-Bellied sheep and Savanna and Boer goats are not typical Brant County livestock, but neither is the story of Paula Martin and Ken Stock of P and Ks Farm.

They operate a livestock meat and egg farm on a 13-acre property on Cockshutt Road near Oakland. P and Ks Farm runs on sustainable principles, whereby the couple reduces as many off-farm inputs as possible while raising poultry and small red meat animals along with farm-gate sale of duck and chicken eggs. They also have an established and growing customer base that goes with it.

Their Facebook page explains: "Take responsibility for what you eat, and how it's raised. Pasture-raised, ethically treated ... We're your local food farm!"

"Our goal is to let them live as naturally as possible," explained Stock. "They're outside in the sunshine and tend to have greater resistance to diseases."

"We want to be sustainable," added Martin, while speaking about the entry and operation costs. "We don't have quota as we want to stay small. We'd rather raise a few great tasting animals for ourselves and either sell the surplus or barter with neighbouring farms for other foods."

Their progress to date is such that the Ontario Agricultural Leadership Conference invited them to share their story at a panel discussion earlier this year. On their Facebook page, Stock wrote, "Paula and I have spent many years on our farm, struggling to build and grow our small enterprise. It is truly awesome to have this chance to share some of our learnings as we forge our path forward."

A couple for 11 years, Stock and Martin hail from families with agricultural backgrounds. Martin, although Kitchener-raised, spent her summers working on her extended family's dairy farm near Hanover. "I worked on the dairy farm and I loved it – it was something that I wanted to do."

Stock's family, from Tavistock, has a cash crop background, focusing on "the business side of agriculture." He studied environmental science, graduating in 2002 "at a time of lay-offs in that field."

Both of them envisioned themselves as farmers after high school. Instead, they both ended working for a multi-national snack food factory for 20 years, where they met and shared their dream of farming. They intended to farm part-time and commute to their jobs from Tavistock.

The choice to practise animal husbandry instead of the more commonplace vegetables as an entry point was easy, said Stock. "When I met Paula, I realized how much she loved animals. Therefore I knew that we wouldn't be growing carrots, as much as we love gardening."

In 2016 they found what was, in Stock's words, "one piece of a gigantic farm on



Ken Stock and Paula Martin.

Cockshutt Road." This land had 13 acres of alfalfa and a century farmhouse. The sandy loam sat on an under pan of clay, which promised to keep deep-rooted crops such as alfalfa green longer during droughts.

The couple spent the first two years installing outbuildings to handle sales and store equipment as well as shelters and fencing. Mennonite farmers dismantled the house, but the couple kept some of the wood for their future dream home in the back field - it is currently under construction.

Martin and Stock moved to the farm in 2018.

They opted for small animals, because in Martin's words, "We wanted small, manageable flocks and herds instead of grass-fed beef. We wanted to be manageable. I'm not entirely comfortable with large animals compared with getting into a pen with a smaller-sized pig or goat."

Their breed choices tend to be weather and food-hardy animals, such as pasture-raised pigs and meat goats, ducks and lambs from wool-free sheep that don't require shearing.

Their resulting breeds are uncommon in Brant-Norfolk. Most of the purebred pigs, for example, are KuneKune. Originally a New Zealand breed, their name is Maori for "fat and round." They take two years to reach market weight. Stock lauds these tasseled critters for their docility and for being "nice straight homesteading pigs that prefer eating grass rather than tearing it up."

During their quest for sustainability, Martin researched herd books, rotational



Pigs are pasture-raised at P and Ks Farm on Cockshutt Road.

grazing practices, breed choices and animal husbandry practices in order to meet the constant requirements to supply water, shelter, feed and suitable fencing.

For instance, their current goat breeds originated from Southern Africa – the Savanna and Boer—breeds chosen to do better on pasture alone thus requiring minimal grain supplement, good parasite and disease resistance and grass diets. Savannas, with their long floppy ears, adapt well to outdoor conditions as the breed originated from the harsh conditions of the African Veldt and make good mothers. Boers have a highly efficient conversion of feed into meat, are muscled and are easy to be with.

The animal breeds demonstrate a high disease resistance point and the farm enforces biosecurity measures; guinea fowl run with the chickens picking at critters such as ticks. "Nature's Lyme disease control," said Stock. Eight geese provide pest control, even shooing away raccoons. "Paula loves them," added Stock. "We're installing a pool in order to encourage them to hatch and raise young."

Sick animals are instantly pulled away during the couple's daily interaction with them. "Ethical farming requires daily contact with the livestock," said Stock.

Head butters, biters, and poor mothers "get eaten quickly", said Martin, explaining that aggressive traits can move forward in the breeding process.

Martin and Stock use an informal marketing referral system with several neigh-

Sustainability a focus at Oakland-area farm



The south side has strategically-situated windows and awnings to better utilize passive solar heating in the winter while keeping the home cool in summer.



View of the newly roughed-in earthship and the north side berm before walls and windows.

bouring grass-fed beef farms and a local farm store for customers wanting produce or beef, which Stock said jives with their sustainability ethic. "We support each other rather than be stuck with a cow or two because someone makes a better product or a cheaper one on the next concession."

Their best sellers are chicken and duck eggs, along with broiler hens and turkeys. Both of the latter are brought in to pasture during the summer and are gone by Thanksgiving. Lambs and ducks are pre-sold, while some of the pork is processed into bacon, sausages and other cuts.

"We have a diverse niche market – we like to have things that other farmers don't have," said Stock. "For example, we have grass-fed lambs instead of the mass-produced New Zealand lambs that dominate Ontario grocery chains. They're pasture-raised for better taste and quality."

"The lambs and goats sell out almost immediately," said Stock. "About 90 percent of the people moving to Canada are now from countries where they eat goat and there are few places locally that offer it."

Advertising on local social media gains some new customers for their meat and an additional "menu" of value-added offerings of bacon, sausages, pepperettes and flattened chicken, which they list with prices and pick up dates. But the farm relies upon a core group of local buyers for the bulk of the sales, said Stock.

"It's all about relationships. It's best to let the top 10 customers know what's up instead of spending lots of time pounding on the keys with social media."

Their latest sustainability ethic is their home which is currently under construction – an earthship.

Developed during the 1970s energy crisis, earthships take on an architectural style rooted in New Mexico. The couple modeled their's after one which their friends – Connie and Craig Cook – built near Long Point in 2014.

Proponents say that earthships are essentially hyper-efficient, passive solar earth shelters that use items such as exterior walls consisting of repurposed earth-packed tires pounded in with soil and concrete – there are 2,000 tires in the P and Ks building.

Such homes utilize passive solar heating from carefully-calculated multiple windows and awnings along the south-facing wall, to absorb heat during the day, retaining heat through the rear wall berm, thermal mass and insulation in the interior walls.

Earthships slowly release the heat during the evening, with minimal additional heating required during the winter, generally keeping such homes at a toasty 20 degrees Celsius year-round.

A cistern has been installed to collect snow and rain water, and a large solar panel exists to the east of the house. Interior greenhouse beds will be installed under the south windows to grow produce. Friends assisted with building the structure when their availability and the heavy farm workload permitted it.

"I would estimate our earthship will cost around \$200,000 for a 2,000 square-foot home, which will not need any outside inputs for our survival – heat, water, electricity, et cetera – so it's one of those pay-up fronts and never-pay-again kind of costs, which works well in our books," said Stock.

The couple are streamlining their farm operation as it evolves, in addition to building the earthship. Stock is confident that their work will inspire similar local farm entry efforts.

"This way of farming will be the biggest trend in next 50 years— it's low energy, produces good tasting meat and there's no big tractors plowing the turf." 🌱



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Fresh produce philosophy and polar bear dips make Dan the Mushroom Man a favourite at the Brantford and Simcoe Farmers' Markets

By Diane Baltaz

Regular customers of Dan McCutcheon at the Brantford and the Simcoe Farmers' Markets may have difficulty believing his confession about his earliest marketing days: "I was the shyest guy in the world." Laughing, he added. "I'd say (using a quiet, polite voice that bordered on timidity), 'Hi, may I help you?'"

Dan, then 12, lived at the Halfway Corner between Port Dover and Simcoe. One day his mother told him that he was going to assist her cousin, Roy Shepherd, sell fruit and vegetables at the Brantford Farmers' Market.

That was in 1970. Shepherd had what McCutcheon called "a summer focus" with three seasonal outdoor stalls selling multiple local fruits and vegetables in addition to a year-round indoor stall.

Inspired by the money earned by his older brother, who preceded him at the job, McCutcheon, conscious of his shyness, said, "I decided to take my chance, to see if I would succeed, although my mother likely told me that I was going to help as Roy was family."

He liked it. When he worked at a local bank for four years after graduating from high school, he continued helping out on weekends. Shepherd died in 1974; his wife sold the business to McCutcheon and his father, George in 1975.

Fifty five years later, McCutcheon, now 67, has three year-round indoor stalls, one of which is in the spot that his cousin rented. He opened a second stall at the Simcoe Farmer's Market when it re-opened in 1981.

He's known as Dan the Mushroom Man, even though he sells other produce. It's a title he traces back to an old, large sign that his family hung above their stall with MUSH-ROOMS painted in bold caps. The moniker expanded to Dan Dan the Mushroom Man because a close friend addressed him as Dan-Dan.

Market onlookers will see the Mushroom Man laughing, smiling and genuinely chatting with customers. McCutcheon knows regulars by name, their buying preferences, when they last visited his stand, and sometimes asking for updates about their lives.

"As a vendor, I like to have visits with people." Aware that local markets are a centuries-old sales medium, he added, "It's a tradition."

His mirth turns serious when he discusses marketing. "My sales philosophy is: buy fresh and try to sell out. My motto is a farmers' market is always about fresh."

Although McCutcheon calls his four-year bank career a "great experience", he said that his corporate stint taught him the value of right individual customer and employee relations.

"It's nice working for oneself as opposed to the way how they (big businesses) treat



Dan McCutcheon is best known as Dan the Mushroom Man at the Simcoe and Brantford Farmers' Markets.

customers," said McCutcheon. "I learned the right way to go about business. I mean having personal, face-to-face service with individual customers, as opposed to the big customers getting preferential treatment in corporate settings."

McCutcheon considers himself "blessed" with the part-time staff he has had over the years.

"I keep in touch with some type of communication with most of my past staff – and there's a 90 percent chance that if they're able, they'll come back to help even if it's been 30 years."

The market veteran dislikes the phrase, "jobber" to describe him. "I prefer retailer extraordinaire," he said, grinning with outstretched arms. "Vendors have different ways of buying – I buy the best, compared with buying older produce at a cheaper price and selling high."

Emphasis is on Ontario produce, which comprises 90 percent of sales, with items such as lettuce and asparagus from Delhi, with other products hailing from Brantford, Flamborough and Leamington. McCutcheon also carries raw honey, maple syrup and locally-made tortilla chips.

McCutcheon obtains produce and sets up the Simcoe stall on Wednesday, in time for the market's Thursday hours, moving on to Brantford on Fridays and Saturdays.

But changes in the Ontario farmscape altered his procurement procedures in recent years.

Increases in the size of farm operations changed some farmers' wholesale proce-

dures, with some enterprises selling exclusively to large stores or through secondary venues such as the Ontario Food Terminal (OFT).

The resulting decrease in local farms selling directly to McCutcheon created a "distance issue" for him to obtain the volume he needs for Simcoe and Brantford. Alternative sites in Niagara and Leamington are impractical, particularly under winter driving conditions.

"I used to pick up most of my produce, but now some of these farms use different MOs (modus operandi) for wholesaling," said McCutcheon. "Small growers are being forced out. Once a seven-acre greenhouse was considered large, but they're minnows now."

Therefore, while McCutcheon still does some local pickups, he now retains someone to obtain the remaining volume from the OFT.

McCutcheon found the marketing upheaval during the pandemic "initially frustrating." He asked, "Why did they shut down markets while the big stores were kept open? People still need to eat."

Presently, a Clarence Street landowner permitted McCutcheon to do roadside pickups. "And thankfully, (Brantford market clerk) Bruce Jacobson fought hard to re-open the market."

Meanwhile the Simcoe vendors developed a curbside pickup and delivery system.

Dan the Mushroom Man a favourite at the Brantford and Simcoe Farmers' Markets

McCutcheon received his orders by phone and text.

"Technology is not my stronghold; I prefer the strong, personal touch. In Simcoe, the delivery or pick up system worked well, but we lost that human contact.... But we made it through."

The current market instability between Canada and the USA produced a noticeable rise in sales of McCutcheon's Ontario produce, with some customers now checking for country of origin.

But one of the most important market activities valued by Dan Dan the Mushroom man occurs at neither market site.

McCutcheon participates in the annual Polar Bear Plunge in Lake Erie in order to fundraise for local charities. It began as the Grand River Dip at the urging of Stan Gorecki, now owner of Heron Head Bikes in order to support Big Brothers and Big Sisters. Now McCutcheon's 30-second dips support various local non-profits such as Steadman's Hospice.

The dip happens with participation and donations from friends, his fellow vendors and customers from the Brantford and Simcoe Farmers' Markets as well as local businesses.

The Polar dip team raises \$6,000 to \$7,000 annually, and a total of approximately \$20,000 in the past three years.

"It's a passion for me," McCutcheon said. "Everyone knows me as Dan the Mushroom Man but my goal is to be remembered as the one to raise funds for charity." 🌱

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Salford Group Inc.'s fastest growing product is the HALO VRT, which "allows producers to adapt to soil and residue conditions by hydraulically changing their tillage intensity on-the-go," said Anson Boak, marketing manager for the company.

By Tamara Botting

It was almost 50 years ago that Jake Rozendaal founded the Canadian-based company that is today known as Salford Group Inc. in Southwestern Ontario.

In 1978, "Jake's business started as a tractor and implement sales dealership, but Jake's talent for improving the implements he was repairing led him to convert the business to Salford Farm Machinery, a full-fledged implement manufacturer," said Anson Boak, marketing manager for the company.

In the early 2000s, Salford developed one of the agricultural industry's first vertical tillage machines, the Residue Tillage Specialist (RTS). This would become an entire product line, renamed the Independent Series. It's still an industry leader in surface tillage and residue management.

A decade later, when Salford Farm Machinery acquired Valmar applicators and BBI spinner spreaders, the company became Salford Group Inc.

"This led Salford to having the widest range of granular fertilizer application technology in agriculture," Boak said. "Throughout this time, Salford has continued to expand their operations, while developing new tillage and nutrient application technologies that are unique in agriculture."

Two of the company's manufacturing operations are located in Southwestern Ontario; it also has a manufacturing facility in Georgia, and parts distribution centres in other key markets across Canada and the US.

Conventional wisdom speaks to the importance of a good location, and that's

certainly been a factor in the company's success over the years.

"Being headquartered in Southwestern Ontario gives Salford some advantages: a relatively long growing season and highly productive land that helps to refine new designs. There is also a deep pool of skilled labour and technically advanced suppliers in the region. Our location lets us push boundaries in the field—mostly out of sight of competitors—and bring high-quality machinery to the market faster," Boak said.

During the COVID pandemic, and again more recently in response to trade market uncertainties, many Canadians have been putting a focus on supporting local businesses with their purchases.

"It's great that some farmers consider Salford products because of our Canadian roots," Boak said, adding that the company is proud to have its headquarters in Canada, with operations on both sides of the border.

However, he noted, it's not just about where a company is located, but the care it brings to making its products.

"Producers choose Salford because our machines last longer, deliver a clear performance advantage, and are backed by an excellent dealer network that stock parts and provides knowledgeable support to Salford owners," Boak said.

Growth and innovation have been ongoing trends over the course of many years.

"Salford built our reputation across the Great Lakes region selling high-quality field cultivators, but as we branched out across North America and into Eastern Europe, our top seller has become the Independent Series vertical tillage products. The new HALO

VRT is our fastest growing product. It allows producers to adapt to soil and residue conditions by hydraulically changing their tillage intensity on-the-go," Boak said.

"On the application side of the business, Salford spinner spreaders are known for durability and spread pattern accuracy. Salford air-boom applicators are unmatched for capacity and application width. Salford spinner and air booms are available as pull-type applicators and chassis-mounted units that integrate with high-clearance sprayer and floater tractors."

In 2022, Salford Group was acquired by Linamar Corporation, a Canadian company.

Offering a range of high-quality products is one aspect of the company's success; another is the great team behind those products.

"We're always looking for talented local people to help grow the business," Boak said, noting that as a manufacturer and marketer of agricultural equipment, the company has jobs in manufacturing, engineering, sales, marketing, accounting, and administration.

To look for open positions, visit salfordgroup.com.

Boak also encouraged Salford owners to connect with the company through its social media channels.

"We engage with Salford fans almost daily and we love to hear their stories," he said.

Editor's Note: This is the first in a series looking at Ontario-manufactured farm equipment. Do you know of other Ontario companies manufacturing farm equipment? If so, please e-mail jeff@granthaven.com. 🌱

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The County of Brant is focusing on the development of the Agriculture sector through the following initiatives:

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The County of Brant Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with the County of Brant and County of Brant Public Library has produced a guide to internet connectivity. The Brant Connectivity Guide provides information to residents and businesses on internet connection options and internet service providers. The guide can be found at brant.ca/connection.



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Contact the County of Brant Economic Development team today for more information.



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The Buy Canadian in grocery stores movement helps Ontario apples to be the first pick for health-conscious eaters

By Diane Baltaz

The vision statement of the Ontario Apple Growers (OAG) reads: Ontario Apples – the first pick for healthy consumers. According to the OGA's new chair, Chris Hedges of Vanessa, this came true for Ontario's 2024 sales – and sales for the 2025 seem to be similarly promising.

"The (Canada-USA) tariff - trade situation improved our 2024 sales and it will hopefully be the case for 2025," said Hedges, who assumed the OAC chair earlier this year. "I've heard reports of others who sold faster this year. It didn't increase the price as most prices for growers are agreed upon in advance. I don't generally have a problem selling my crop but these faster sales means less storage. As a grower, we're happy to be out sooner."

Hedges hopes that with the current U.S. administration, 2025 domestic prices may be higher with chains responding to the consumer demand for buying Canadian.

“**The biggest competitor to the apple is the long produce aisle**”

The OAG represents the province's 200-plus farmers with more than 10 acres of trees from the five apple growing regions in Ontario. The association promotes generic apple sales and varieties to consumers, supports members with information on orchard efficiency, advocacy, collaboration and innovation.

Hedges took over from former chair Brian Rideout of Blenheim, who led the OAG since December 2023.

This OAG chair's expertise comes at a time when Ontario remains a net importer of apples and apple product. But the association's July 2020 economic impact statement reads, "Ontario's apple growers are in an expansion mode and the majority of growers are optimistic about the future of the apple business ... with growth expected in all five apple growing districts."

2025 crop estimates issued by the OAG in July forecasted a 5.6 percent increase for an estimated 8,959,000 bushels (376,260,000 lbs) this year. The top varieties, in order of production, are as follows: Gala, Honeycrisp, Ambrosia, McIntosh, Red Delicious and Empire.

"These estimates are listed in order of acreage plantings with the Mac and Red Delicious likely being legacy plantings," said Hedges.

Because consumer preferences constantly change, growers periodically



OAG chair Chris Hedges of Vanessa.

replace traditional favourites, such as the McIntosh and Delicious, with newer varieties.

"Gala and Honeycrisp were among the earlier plantings when consumer demand changed."

"Apples are a staple in households," said Hedges. "We need to make sure that we supply the varieties they want; historically Canadians prefer sweet-tart varieties like



The Ontario Apple Growers estimated a 5.6% increase in apple production this season.

Mac and Empire; now there's greater preference for the pure sweet ones like Gala and Ambrosia."

While national fruit and vegetable consumption levels vary, apples are the most consumed fruit in Canada, according to a January 2020 Leger poll. But they compete with other produce and continually need marketing venues such as Foodland Ontario



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The Buy Canadian in grocery stores movement helps Ontario apples to be the first pick for health-conscious eaters

in order to remain at the forefront of Buy Local campaigns. And comparatively few Ontario apples are exported, said Hedges.

"We're competing with imports and low-priced imports are still a reality. Ontario commercial apple producers must be competitive in a world market," said Hedges.

"The biggest competitor to the apple is the long produce aisle – the chains carry absolutely everything from everywhere. Ontario Apple's job is to help the consumer choose us, especially when they have consumers with tightening budgets from rising interest rates and other causes."

The OAG does vigorous promotion from in-store tastings to social media about the varieties, uses and benefits of consuming the province's 15 commonly-marketed apples. In support of this goal, the association received up to \$400,000 of provincial funding in October, 2024 in part to educate consumers about the "world class" Ontario apple.

Growing costs in some areas may be slightly higher in 2025 because of the need to irrigate orchards due to sparse rainfall.

"Most of the province was dry with spotty rains, but to date, the weather was not horribly bad because there was no hail."

Hedges said that Ontario apple production was at 30,000 acres in the late 1990s; acreage has since declined to a little over 15,000 acres.

"Yet production levels are about the same,"

Hedges is a first-generation apple grower who began in 1998, eventually expanding to 700 acres.

"It's enough," he laughed.

Most of Hedges' crop goes to Martin's Apples in Waterloo Region for value-added product. He also owns Ontario Orchard Supply, selling orchard products to his fruit growers.

The OAG chair first served as a director from 2005 to 2012 before returning to the board in 2020 and becoming vice-president in 2023. Hedges previously participated with the OAG Risk Management Committee, as well as the Ontario Agricultural Commodity Council and the Fruit and Vegetable Growers of Canada's Apple Working Group. He was also a director on the board of the International Fruit Tree Association and has hosted an international group who toured Ontario farms.

Ontario Apple Facts from the OAG's 2020 economic impact statement)

- Approximately 22 jobs are created for every 1.0 million in spending by the Ontario apple sector.

- Each Million dollars in output by apple growers generates \$2.03 million of activity throughout the Ontario economy.

- Every \$10 million spent by apple processors on non-apple inputs creates an additional \$26.2 million in economic activity

- Ontario apple growers' contribution to the provincial economy stares with production – based on an average annual volume of 305.6 million pounds of apples; their apple shipments are worth an average of \$123.1 million annually.

- Ontario apple growers ship an average of 229.2 million pounds of apples annually to packing facilities in the province. The apple packing sector ... creates \$156.3 mil-

lion in economic activity province-wide and 1,781 full time jobs with wages and salaries of \$76.3 million. The packing sector adds \$110.5 million to the provincial GDP, resulting in tax revenues of \$47.7 million for the three levels of government.

- Value-added processing creates an additional \$196.1 million in economic activity and 2,247 jobs with wages and salaries of \$94.2 million and increases provincial GDP by \$133.7 million. 🍏

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From urbanite to Brae Manor Hobby Farm

How one family is restoring farming as it was in the Victorian Era



Annette and Margaret in the repurposed greenhouse.

By Laura Richardson

Those driving along River Road in Paris cannot help but notice the large yellow brick Victorian home nestled on an expansive property, and the sign that welcomes passers-by to an intimate you-pick flower garden, as well as a stand with a variety of produce that is hand-picked.

What you wouldn't be able to tell is that it was merely eight years ago that these hobby farmers of a wide variety of produce were inexperienced city dwellers.

Wanting to move closer to family but also to “do a 180 from the life that we were living in the city”, the Szarka family, which included their three small boys, decided to embark upon a journey that has provided them with a deep respect for those who farm full time. Upon first viewing the grounds, they were aware that little connection to the original farm was present beyond what was engraved in plaster on the cornices of the interior - corn, sugar maple, grapes, berries and apples - silent memorials to the bustling produce of the property's yesteryear. The family of five instantly had a vision of a roadside stand, with the little that remained of the original property - the produce from a few old fruit and nut trees - as the stand's first offerings.

The Manor was built in 1892 by the man who ran the gypsum mines that are now Green Lane Sports Fields. The goal of the current owners was to restore the property to what it once was, and they have hit the ground running with this intent.

The back few acres have been returned to a wildflower meadow, where bees, cared for by a friend, dine on nectar and return delicious wildflower honey. They have planted a small orchard of apples, pears, peaches,



Brae Manor Hobby Farm during lavender harvest.

plums and cherries in addition to the century-old apple and apricot trees that bore witness to the property as it once bustled. The family enjoys eggs from their “pampered pets”, a small flock of chickens who entertain Fred and Wilma, the cherished manor canines. Their largest endeavour has been their gardens, some of which produce floral perennials, but another which they have planted with produce to feed their now-teen-age boys.



Elderberry ready for the picking.

That dream of a roadside stand has developed into a multi-faceted farm experience for those who stop by to explore, with seasonal offerings including zucchini, heritage tomatoes, sauce apples, eggs, honey, “amazing mint which makes the best sweetest tisane”, apricots, pears, peaches, plums, quince, elderberry, apples, flowers, cut flowers, perennials, and lavender.



The 3 Sisters of the Mercantile, from left to right, Annette, Margaret and Michelle.

From urbanite to Brae Manor Hobby Farm

They simply grow enough to feed their family and put at the road all that is extra, not wanting anything to go to waste. They also offer boho picnics in one of their favourite spaces - their wildflower meadow. The desiring to provide a more intimate approach to a farm market: "more of a feel like you're walking in your own garden experience."

Just this past year, the family expanded further, naming their stand 3Sisters Mercantile, selling all of their products in addition to candles, soaps, mint tea, honey and lavender products. The familiar title of the mini market is a homage to the farm co-owner, Michelle Szarka, and her two invaluable sisters who "have been the best worker bees imaginable and their input, creativity and generosity of spirit and time will be forever appreciated."

Even with the help of family, farmers big and small face challenges, and these former city-slickers have had their fair share. Their well went dry once and they lost a great deal of produce. They have faced pests galore from nasty gypsy moths, and Japanese beetles, to the cuter kinds like hungry rabbits and foxes. Sighting rainfall ebbs and flows and weather patterns as two of the uncontrollable variables, these smallholders aptly describe farming as a "moving target" sharing that "We're now convinced farming is anything but simple and as part time farmers we have a new reverence for full time farmers." The family works in the film industry, so are equipped, however, to handle the yo-yo of farming demands as the film industry is also "feast or famine".

When asked what the family especially enjoys growing, Michelle is quick to divulge that lavender is at the top of the list, sharing that they hope to join the Purple Road with the help of the Lavender Association of Ontario.

Restoration is always close to the heartbeat of humankind, and this family has been blessed to be given the determination to see through the restoration of this property, which they now share with so many others, whether in taste or experience, who stop by to enjoy a glimmer of the Edenic, which harkens to us all. 🌱



3 Sisters and Two Dogs - Wilma the Wheaten and Fred the Sheepadoodle.

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Celebrating 'nature's perfect food' as Egg Farmers of Ontario turns 60

By Luke Edwards

Diamonds are created under pressure, and so too was the Egg Farmers of Ontario, which is celebrating its 60th - or diamond - anniversary in 2025.

The organization held a special annual general meeting earlier this spring, bringing together hundreds of industry members to celebrate the milestone, reflect on the history of egg farming in the province, and chart a course for the future. That future seems bright, even though egg producers continue to face significant animal health and economic headwinds.

"We're at a place where I think we're as strong as we've ever been to protect our food sovereignty here in terms of supply management and keeping our food supply in place, so I'm optimistic," said Chris Mullet Koop, a fifth generation egg farmer in Jordan, whose family also grows wine grapes.

A big reason for that optimism in the face of challenges is the continued support of the supply management system, which wasn't easy to get started but has since provided farmers and consumers alike with a certainty that allows producers to invest for the future and keeps egg prices from being as volatile as we see elsewhere.

In normal times that may mean higher egg prices here, than in, say, the United States. However, multiple speakers pointed out it's a small price to pay to ensure stability. Consumers south of the border have been paying skyrocketing prices for eggs, as avian influenza sweeps through the huge poultry operations in that country.

"We have a predictable and affordable supply of nature's perfect food," said Brian Douglas, chair of the Farm Products Council of Canada.

And even if Americans often pay less than us for eggs (at least when disease isn't causing massive numbers of bird deaths) there are two things Canadians should keep in mind, argued University of Waterloo history professor and public policy chair for the Egg Farmers of Canada Bruce Muirhead. First, egg prices in Canada are comparable or lower than places like Europe and Australia. Second, the price of American eggs - like much of the food the country produces - is artificially low thanks to huge government subsidies that are ultimately paid for by taxpayers.

Canada's supply management system, meanwhile, requires no government dollars, something Muirhead said remains underappreciated by the public.

"I think more Canadians should probably know this," he said.

A new Federal-Provincial-Territorial Agreement for the sector was a huge development for the entire Canadian egg industry. Signed last fall, the agreement reduces inter-provincial trade barriers and secures "your future for the next 50 years," Douglas told those in attendance. With provincial trade barriers an



Chris Mullet Koop and his son Josiah at the Egg Farmers of Ontario annual general meeting. The organization is celebrating 60 years in 2025, and the two are posing in front of a sign that includes photos and information of their family farm.

increased concern now given the erratic tariff threats of U.S. President Donald Trump, having already signed an agreement keeps Canada's egg producers in a good spot.

Ontario and Canada have faced uncertain economic times in the past. Amy Cronin, chair of the Ontario Farm Products Marketing Commission said Ontario's agrifood sector will once again play a key role in upcoming months.

"The industry will be able to pull the province and country through some really tough times," she said.

THE EARLY STRUGGLE FOR SUPPLY MANAGEMENT

Historically, egg production wasn't the industry it later became. Muirhead, who has written about the history of eggs and supply management, said it wasn't until the early 1900s that eggs became more professionalized. Before that, it was often the job of the farmer's wife or children to collect whatever eggs their chickens produced.

Fortunately, that professionalization came at a key time. The 10 lost years of the Great Depression left many without steady sources of food and protein.

"They were 10 hungry years as well," Muirhead said.

"Eggs had a role to play in the prevention of starvation."

But as farmers - along with researchers and scientists - began to focus more attention on egg production, they also ran into a familiar problem: overproduction.

"Overproduction is the bane of every farmer's existence," Muirhead said.

In a way it's illogical. A farmer who needs to increase income would often come to the logical conclusion that they need to produce more. However, that's not always the case.

Muirhead cited a stat that one per cent of over supply can lead to a five per cent reduction in price. It starts to feed a vicious loop.

Following the Second World War, Muirhead said the idea that agriculture should be a part of the overall economic boom began to take shape. However, that overproduction issue continued to hurt farmers. Eventually, the government started a royal commission to discuss rural issues and deal with what had become known as the "farm problem."

Things had gotten so bad that between April 1970 and October 1971, Muirhead said no major producer showed a profit.

Mullet Koop remembers his family talking about that time. They were lucky in that the grape growing side of their business helped offset the losses experienced with eggs.

"I think the only reason my family could do it was because they had wine grapes and they were growing wine grapes and just putting money back into poultry," he said. In fact, their family nearly got out of poultry altogether, Mullet Koop added.

The implementation of supply management took time and considerable effort to get farmer buy-in, said Muirhead, as it was hard to see how less is more.

However, even after consensus grew among the farming community, the system continued to face headwinds from a public that didn't fully understand how it worked. Muirhead said misleading news articles of the day painted supply management as something that makes millionaires out of farmers.

If that were true, Mullet Koop said he and his family missed the boat.

"When the stories are out there that eggs are cheaper in the U.S. and Canadian farm-



Celebrating 'nature's perfect food' as Egg Farmers of Ontario turns 60

ers are gouging people and saying 'look at them, they're just millionaires.' Well, I'm not. I don't know which egg farmers are, but I'm not a millionaire," he said.

While the supply management system is about as secure as it gets, Muirhead said it's important for each generation to recommit to it. He, and others, were happy to see several younger farmers at the AGM, a testament to the sustainability - from a social, economic, political and environmental standpoint - of the sector.

Mullet Koop's son Josiah was also at the AGM. Mullet Koop said his kids, from fairly early on, were fully engaged in the farm. They'll be working through the succession planning, with the possibility of expansion with Josiah taking over the current operation and his siblings looking at other options and ways to partner.

ADVANCEMENTS A PROJECT OF 'NEVERENDING PROGRESS'

Craig Hunter, a past director for Egg Farmers of Ontario, has spent his entire life in the world of egg production. And during that time the changes to the industry as a whole has been nothing short of "absolutely mind boggling," he said.

Hunter offered an overarching history of production during the past 60 years, focus-

ing his attention on a few areas: Genetics, health, nutrition, housing and education.

"It's one of neverending progress," he said, that's led to "more efficient, more sustainable and more humane" operations.

Historically, farmers primarily kept dual purpose chickens, getting a small number of eggs from the hens before slaughtering them for meat. When farmers began focusing on genetics and improving breeds, chicks would often be delivered through the mail.

"It was fun days when I'd get to the post office and hand these chicks over," Hunter recalled.

Nowadays, single purpose breeds can lay two times as many eggs as those 70 years ago.

Improved health, nutrition and housing have also helped increase production and overall animal welfare, Hunter said.

First, antibiotics helped reduce the spread of disease but once it was discovered that it was leading to other issues such as antibiotic resistant strains, the sector moved to vaccines and to a focus on prevention.

Improved nutrition meant maximizing and optimizing egg production, while housing improvements initially focused on produc-

tion before also taking into consideration overall animal welfare.

IN A GOOD SPOT

Today, egg producers in Ontario seem to have found the right system that benefits farmers and consumers alike.

Muirhead said the average farm has about 23,500 hens. That may seem like a lot to an outsider, but it's nothing compared to the massive multimillion bird operations south of the border. And with migratory birds returning north this spring and the threat of avian flu comes with it, presenters said the smaller operations in Ontario will help protect the overall sector.

Strong biosecurity measures will also help.

"The industry has paid close attention to biosecurity," said Cronin.

"Biosecurity doesn't cost, it pays," added Hunter.

And while they can't do much about the threats from the White House - "we're facing uncertainty every day, and we've got 1,346 more days of this," Douglas said - dealing with these issues together is the surest way of surviving them intact, the speakers said.

"Unity is critical," Douglas said.

"It's a cooperative venture, not a competitive one," added Muirhead. 🌱



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New OFA rep brings wealth of experience

By Jeff Helsdon

Joanne Fuller may be new to the role of Member Service Representative (MSR) for the OFA in Brant, Haldimand and Norfolk, but she brings a wealth of experience to the role.

The MSR role is to support members in all three counties, support the federation boards to fulfill their mandates with the members, work with boards to engage the members, and to teach people about agriculture.

The Norfolk position became open when Wil Stoneman accepted a position as drainage superintendent with Norfolk County.

Fuller was working for the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) as projects and training coordinator, assisting MSRs across the province. When Stoneman left, she was asked to assist filling the gap.

"I did both jobs for a while and then they asked me if I would take on that role," she recounted. "For me getting back to the grassroots is amazing."

Fuller brings with her experience working with all three levels of government, and connections made while working with people across the province with OFA. She is bringing "that passion I have for agriculture" to the job, and hopes to assist members and the boards deal with municipal government, economic development, agriculture education and agriculture employment.

The position of MSR isn't new to Fuller. She started with OFA as MSR for Middlesex and Lambton counties, before taking on a provincial role for a farmer wellness program. When that program changed, she moved to projects and training coordinator.

Although she lives in the east edge of Middlesex County in Crampton, Fuller said much of her job is done remotely. As for in-person events, she said the geography can be deceiving.

"It's closer for me to get to Brant, Haldimand and Norfolk than it is places in Lambton and Middlesex."

Although she doesn't live on a farm and didn't grow up on one, Fuller has been deeply embedded in farming her entire life and has a passion for it.

"I have a lot of agriculture roots. My kids are both in agriculture, I chaperoned for 4-H, and just very much blended in the agriculture community," she said.

Fuller's working career was started in municipal government administration as an executive assistant to the clerk, council and the CAO for the County of Middlesex and the Municipality of Thames Centre. She left those positions to work with OFA in 2016, and brought unique government experience to the MSR role in Lambton and Middlesex.

"My blend of municipal and agriculture is very valuable in that role, and still is when I take it to Brant, Haldimand and Norfolk," she said.

“For me getting back to the grassroots is amazing.” said Joanne Fuller.



Joanne Fuller

These 4-H'ers catered to the masses at the Paris Fair during the Labour Day weekend



People attending the Paris Fair livestock exhibitions enjoyed the Brant 4-H catering club's convenient location. Carley Young of Burford is seen taking orders.



Carson Sayles of South Dumfries Township serves two hotdogs while Carley Young looks on.

By Diane Baltaz

Eight Brant youth aged 11 to 17 developed job skills in addition to enjoying the Pair Fair's livestock shows during the Labour Day weekend.

These eight kids belonged to Brant 4-H's new catering club, which met Mondays in June, July and August. The club, led by Nicole Marcy and Angie Cain, taught the youth skills for working in food service. Its 4-H Achievement involved working at a food booth near the cattle ring at the Paris Fair.

The club borrowed a 4-H food trailer from the Niagara club for the weekend fair. They placed it strategically near the cattle ring where there was no nearby food trucks, although there were food booths by private vendors and two county Lions' clubs further on.

Marcy said the participants learned how to count money, give change, make coffee, cook food, the role of the health unit in food service, how to cost food and then setting retail prices, customer service skills and how to work as a team in a kitchen.

Foods served included hotdogs, beef and peameal bacon on a bun, with choices of pop and coffee. The trailer was busiest during show times in the first half of the day, with exhibitors and audience enjoying its convenient location. The club's co-leaders helped out by cooking the meat on the barbeque behind the booth during the rush hours. Marcy said that the youth took turns cooking the food during slower periods when there were not queues of customers placing orders.

The 4-H advertised the catering club as "a great opportunity to get some involvement in our community."

Other community involvement clubs held this year included first responder, which exposed youth to careers or what is involved in being an OPP officer, firefighter or a paramedic. For several years, Brant 4-H has also led participatory events at the Bell Homestead on Tutela Heights Road in partnership with the homestead to allow youth to gain skills as guides for special events. 🌱



Coffee "barista" Avery Marcy was one of the eight Brant 4-H youth who staffed the 4-H food booth at the Paris Fair.

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Federation of Agriculture crop signs highlight agriculture’s importance to Brant County



BFA soybean sign at the junction of the Drumbo and Pinehurst Roads – a busy commuter route.



This corn crop sign is on the Ayr Road near the Brant border south of Ayr.

By Diane Baltaz
Although a few have been stolen over time, the Brant Federation of Agriculture (BFA)’s crop sign program is in its third year of highlighting the importance of the county’s agriculture to passers-by.

The BFA created 30 aluminum signs in 2023, with 10 each for corn, soybeans and wheat. They modeled them after similar signs erected in several other counties, including Elgin. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) co-funded this project.

Several federation members raised the signs in front of corn, wheat and soybean fields along high-traffic roads throughout Brant County in the spring. They will be removed after the crops are harvested.

The goal is to increase awareness among the non-farming population about the crops grown in Brant County and the uses of these crops.

According to an Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) press release, the signs remind residents about the value of farmland and the need for its preservation for growing crops. “It contributes not only to our local food, but non-food uses,” the statement read.

Although Brant County has some of Ontario’s most fertile land, Canadian census statistics indicate that the municipality had a 10 per cent decline in the total area of farms between 2016 and 2021.

The OFA states that Ontario loses an average of 319 acres (129.09 ha) of productive farmland daily.

Burford farmer and OFA representative for Brant-Haldimand-Norfolk Counties Larry Davis was part of the sign installation team, focusing on the northwest section of Brant. While uncertain of a measurable impact the signs have, he

said, “Some people have commented to me that they’re spotted the signs.”

Davis added that one of the ones he erected in front of a corn field near the Brant-Oxford County line west of Paris had been stolen and probably “repurposed.”

That brings the total number of signs lost over the past three years to five, according to BFA past president Mark Eddy – who is credited with spearheading the campaign in 2023.

Brant County had a shorter-term “sign campaign” this summer.

The Brant 4-H Agricultural Awareness Club created a poster listing 2021 Brant County

farmland statistics as part of their “achievement” at the Paris Fair over the Labour Day weekend. Club members created the poster after visiting five area farms and a flour mill this summer. Brant 4-H’s initial spring-summer clubs description stated that the poster will also be displayed at the Burford Fair in October. 🌱

County statistics from the Brant 4-H Ag Awareness Club display at the Paris Fair

- 669 farms
- 222 acres is the average size
- 148,590 acres of farmland
- 14% of farms sell directly to the consumer





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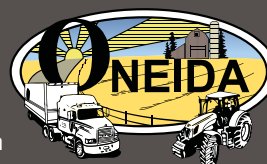
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BY LAURA RICHARDSON

Peaches offer versatility for the chef



Everything Is Peachy

According to Stats Canada, Ontario has a little over 200 peach farms. Across the nation, there are just over 800 with a farm gate value of just over \$50 million. This works out to a food availability of .96 kilograms of fresh peaches available per Canadian. If you enjoy purchasing a bushel basket of peaches at a time, you might find your eyes bigger than your belly. If this is the case, we have some tried and true recipes for you from the Moose Lodge Kitchen (Moose, my dog, is pictured here by my young peach tree).

Peach Chicken

- 2 packages chicken breasts, thighs or legs
- ½ cup flour
- 2 T. vegetable oil
- ¼ t. Salt & pepper
- 1 sliced onion
- 4 peaches, sliced
- 1 bell pepper, sliced
- ½ cup barbecue sauce
- 2 T. soy sauce
- ½ cup peach juice

Mix flour, salt and pepper and use to coat chicken. Add oil to skillet and brown chicken. Then add chicken to cake pan. Top with sliced onions. Mix barbecue sauce, peach juice, and soy sauce and pour over chicken. Bake at 350 for 35 minutes. Add peach slices and peppers and return to the oven and bake for another 20 minutes or until meat is cooked through. Enjoy!

Peach Salad (And Dressing!)

- 1 clamshell salad greens
- 2 peaches, sliced



- ½ cucumber, sliced thinly
 - 1 cup feta cheese
 - ½ red onion, thinly sliced
 - Dressing
 - 1 small can of peaches, including juice
 - 1 cup cider vinegar
 - 2/3 cup oil
 - 1 t. Basil
 - 1 t. Italian seasoning
 - ½ t. Salt
 - ¼ t. Fresh pepper
- Mix in blender and serve atop salad for summer freshness and a sweet/tart delight!

Peach Salsa

- 1 cup diced fresh Ontario tomatoes
 - 2 cups diced fresh peaches
 - 1 sweet pepper diced
 - 1 jalapeno pepper, finely diced
 - ½ sweet onion, diced finely
 - ¼ cup cilantro (if cilantro tastes like soap to you, substitute basil)
 - 2 T. lime juice
 - ¼ t. Sea salt and ground pepper
- Mix and serve with nachos or Triscuits!

Super Simple Peach Sorbet

You won't believe you have never tried this recipe! It's only two ingredients and it is so refreshing!



- 1 can sweetened condensed milk
 - About 3 cups of frozen peach slices
- Mix these two items in a good blender. Serve immediately.

Dessert in a flash!

Peachy Health Benefits

Each peach that you consume in these wonderful recipes provide about 7 per cent of your daily fibre intake needs, 6% of your vitamin A and 15 per cent of your vitamin C (if uncooked). For the calorie conscious, peaches contain just fifty calories. As a wonderful bonus, they also contain several antioxidants that are protective scavengers fighting free radicals in the body. 🍑

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From firefighting to farming, an adventure for Brant woman

By Brenda Dredge

There's something to be said for 'just hanging out' with the animals at the end of a busy day or ...just because. One local woman, Joanna McMorrow, is living that dream and loving every minute of it.

McMorrow, a full-time firefighter in Brantford for 19 years, is one busy lady and the grass does not grow under her feet.

A veterinary technician for over 15 years who started out with five years at Brantford Beattie Animal Hospital, she also worked at various emergency vet clinics in Hamilton and Brantford and an equine vet clinic in Collingwood.

"I got bored of it and I knew I needed a new challenge," she said.

McMorrow purchased a property on River Road, Brantford and had five horses and three miniatures. Between her firefighting career and her farm, she is one busy lady!

Five years ago, McMorrow purchased the Savvy Grit Ranch on Conc. 3, Wilsonville and has never looked back.

"It's a dream of mine that I've been working towards my whole life. It's taken a lot of blood, sweat and tears. I do pretty much everything around here myself. I've built the bulk of the fencing, the round training pen...I figure out how to do it and then just do it. I've learned a lot of life's lessons on a farm".

She is well versed in pretty much all areas of farming...from the ground up. For McMorrow it



Brantford firefighter Joanne McMorrow is the owner of Savvy Grit Ranch, a ranch with a diversity of farm animals from horses to pigs and a blind rooster. She learned a lot about farming with the venture and hopes to share it with others.

was "nose to the ground to get the infrastructure done".

For the most part, McMorrow spends her time outside tending not only the horses but their 'buddies'... pigs, sheep and goats. She did have chickens, but unfortunately wild animals killed them. She also has 'Mr. Cock-a-doodles', a blind rooster.

"He's about 11 or 12 years old and was attacked by a wild animal. He's high maintenance but he's just part of the farm here."

McMorrow also has the odd boarder and owners can freely visit their horses and spend time with them in calm surroundings. Some of the animals have been hand raised since only hours or days old and would make good therapy animals if someone wanted to reach out and facilitate such a service at her ranch.

"I come from humble beginnings," she said. "I never grew up on a farm, but I have always loved animals and would often

bring sick animals home. I got into horses in my mid-20s and have taken the odd lesson. Now, I like to share my knowledge with others. I don't turn people away. This is a spot where people can come out and learn and experience things they never knew."

She hopes to offer youth camps in the future.

McMorrow spends much of her time maintaining her farm and, for the most part, spends her spare time outside.

"I love the outdoors."

McMorrow doesn't consider her farm 'work' or a 'job' but rather a labour of love. She has 24 acres with 14 of them in hay.

"A farmer cuts and bales the hay for me. Just this year I bought my own hay Tedder and a hay rake. I fertilize myself and I have my own manure spreader".

McMorrow is definitely a 'Jack of all trades' – or should it be 'Jill of all trades'?

The farm has a large arena where she can hold clinics and fun nights.

"I would love to host some corporate events in there eventually," she said.

She does rent it out for some private events. McMorrow is just one of those 'people persons' who is fortunate to be doing something she loves doing and is passionate about sharing that love with others.

At present, McMorrow is looking for some dedicated individuals to volunteer and want to belong to a great team. They will have the opportunity to learn about the health and welfare of the various animals on her farm from donkeys, mules, horses, sheep, goats, pigs, her resident blind rooster to cats and dogs. It will entail a number of farm duties in all aspects of running and maintaining a farm and beyond. If you have always wanted to ride but couldn't afford to have a horse this might just be your opportunity. If this sounds like something you might be interested in, you can contact McMorrow with any questions. She can be found on Facebook under Savvy Grit Ranch or through her email savvygritranch@gmail.com.

Savvy Grit Ranch is located at 366 Conc. 3, Wilsonville.

"Everybody around here has been wonderful...they are great people".

McMorrow is always willing to share her stories with visitors. But be prepared to spend some time meeting her 'family' of fur and feather creatures. 🌿

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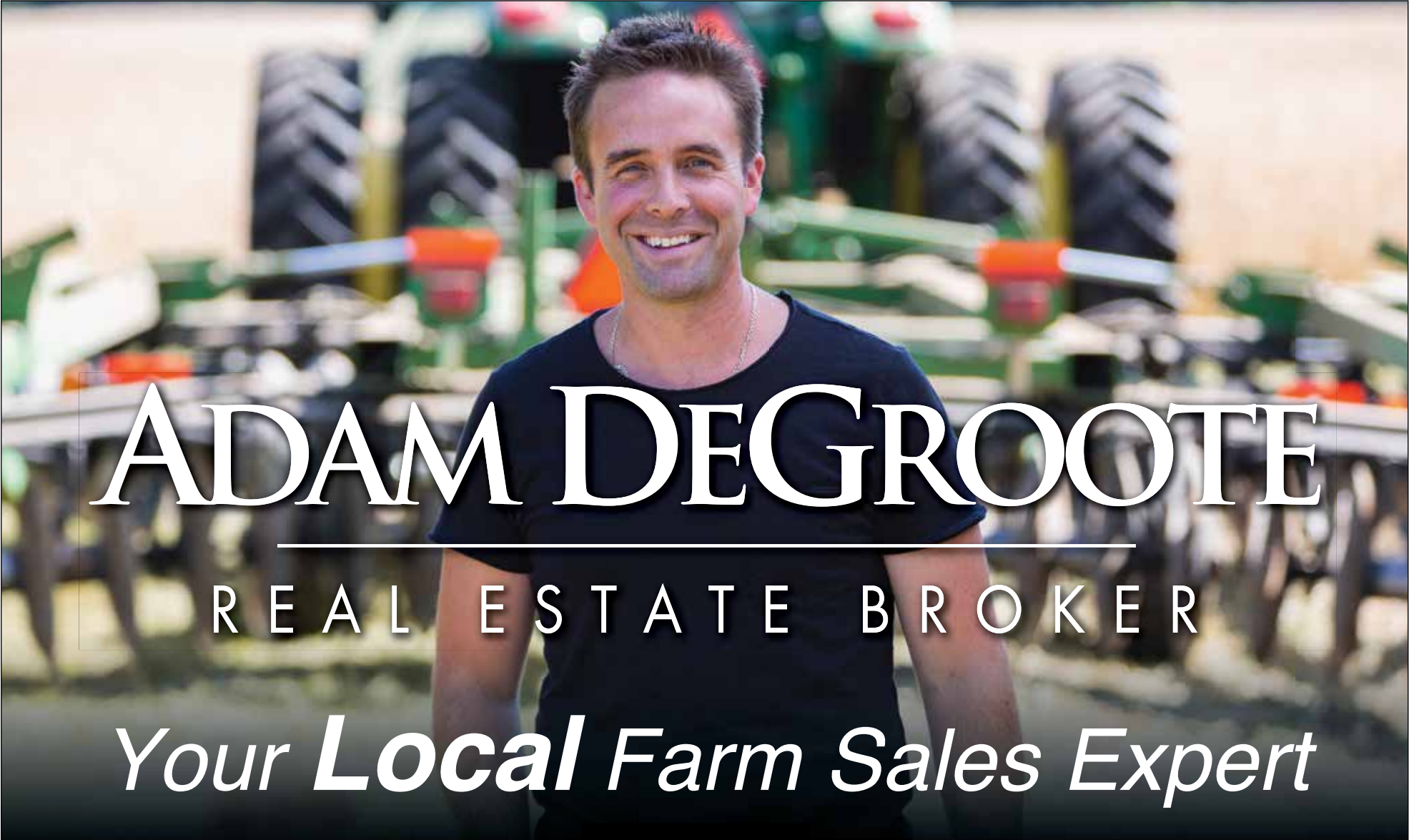
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