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SECTION A / ISSUE 35 / FALL 2025



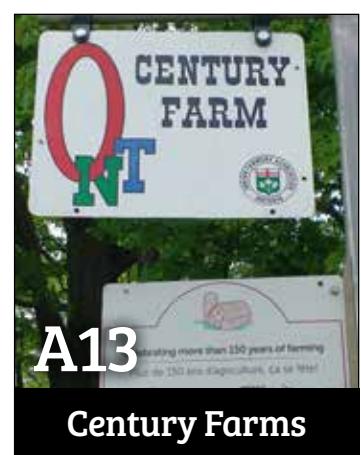
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# NORFOLK FARMS

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## DID YOU KNOW?

That the farm gate value of Ontario's apple crop is approximately \$120 million? This includes sales to fresh and processing markets, as well as on farm and pick your own sales.

## DID YOU KNOW?

That there are different qualities you should look for when buying your pumpkins this autumn? If it's for decoration, it's better to pick one that has a sturdy stem and is relatively lighter. For cooking, a small pie pumpkin is the better choice; you'll want one that feels heavy for its size, and has firm, smooth skin.

## DID YOU KNOW?

That onions are members of the lily family? Their relatives

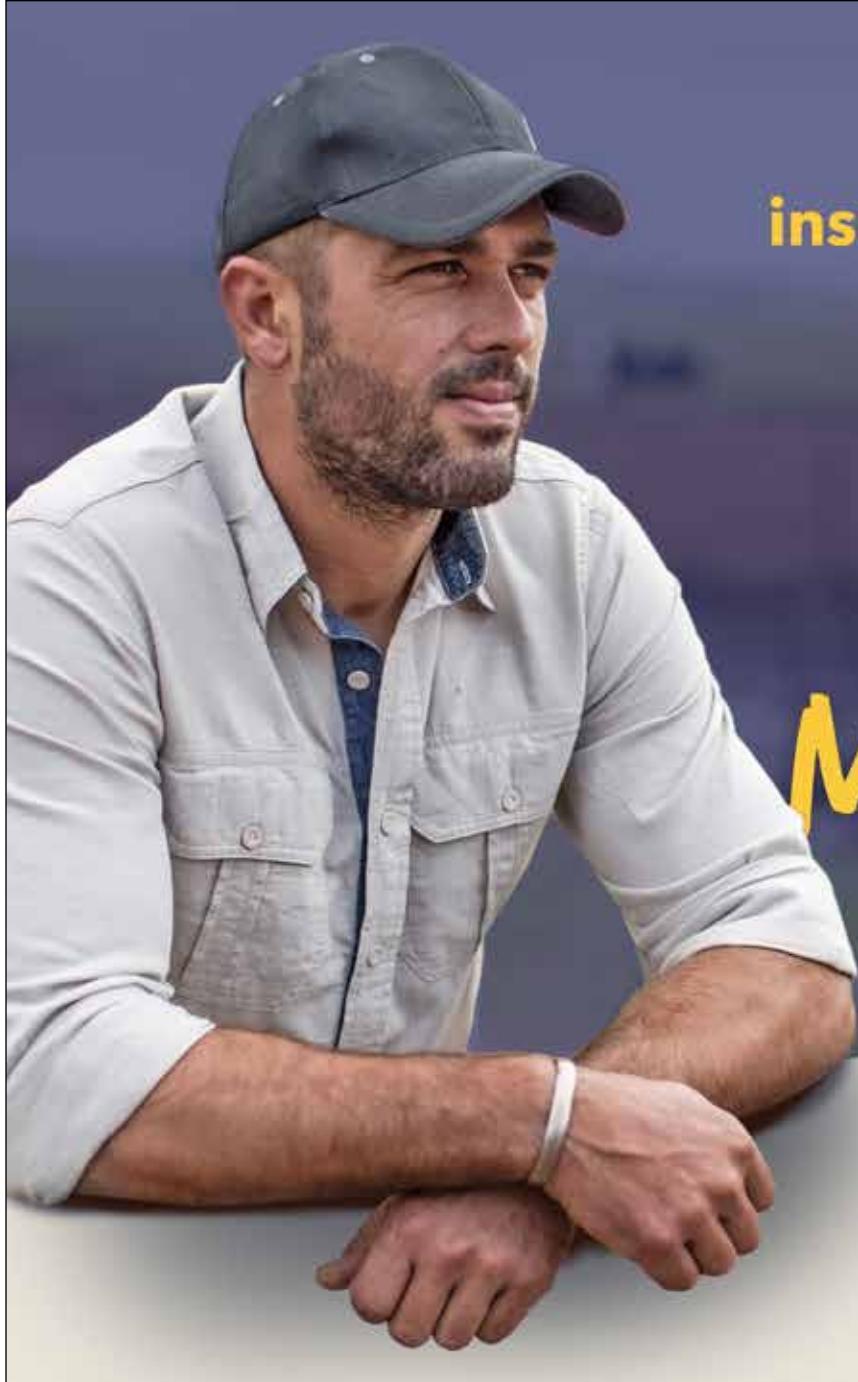
include asparagus, the yucca plant and tulips.

## DID YOU KNOW?

That Giovanni Batista Scozzafava, from Niagara Falls, ON, is currently the Guinness World Records holder for growing the longest zucchini courgette, which measured in at 2.52 metres (8 feet, 3.3 inches)? Scozzafava said he didn't use any fertilizer or manure; he just gave the plant plenty of water.

## DID YOU KNOW?

That hazelnuts grow in the wild in Ontario? These versatile nuts can be eaten fresh, dried or roasted, and are a nutritious snack, being a rich source of vitamin E, folate, B vitamins and protein.



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# Ag Robotics Day gives insight into the future of agriculture



The crowd at the second annual AgRobotics Working Day shows the growing interest in the use of robotics for agriculture. While common in the dairy industry, with robotic milkers, robots are just starting to make their way into field crops.

**By Jeff Helsdon**

How far off is the day that will see increased use of robots for common farming practices?

Answers to this question was on the forefront as the AgRobotics Working Group hosted a demo day at the Ontario Crops Research Centre in Simcoe on July 22. On display were several robots that are either on the market, or nearing that point.

There were nine different robots on display for those attending the demo day. These ranged from laser weeders and an asparagus harvester that can identify the ripeness of spears and decide which to harvest to drone sprayers and electric robotic tractors.

Since the AgRobotics Working Group was formed in 2021, it has grown exponentially. It started when Chuck Baresich of Haggerty Creek, a Chatham-Kent based agriculture company, approached the Ministry of Agriculture about robotics in farming. The group was formed and began to look into the possibility of using robots and artificial intelligence (A.I.) to solve many problems growers are facing. At the end of the first year, the group was working with five different robots. Since then, the number of participants has jumped to 400 and the number of robots been looked at has also increased.

Brigitte Mahon, the group's project manager, explained that robots don't need to be stationary and can be as simple as a washing machine or automated tractors.

"Farmers have been quick to adapt technology over the years because farming has been hard work," she said.

As Baresich later explained, robotics have been common in animal agriculture for some time, but are just starting for field crops and orchards.

Showcasing a laser weeder that his company, Haggerty AgRobotics is working with, he explained labour is becoming a larger issue for farmers, and he suspects it could get worse. Robotics will be a solution of the future to address the problem.

The laser weeder is programmed to identify different species of weeds. At the demonstration day, confetti was spread on the ground

underneath to show its effectiveness. The machine found the small pieces of paper and burned them. Baresich explained it doesn't actually burn weeds, though, but provides just enough heat to kill.

"Having too much laser power is a waste of energy," he said.

The machine runs off three 48-volt lithium batteries and can be pulled behind a regular tractor. It is designed to operate at a speed of .3 to .4 miles per hour.

Baresich also showcased the drones that are being experimented with for aerial spraying. His company started working with smaller drones and eventually found the model he demonstrated, which is about two meters wide. It's set up to automatically spray a field using GPS coordinates. He did point out no agriculture substances are legal to spray from drones at this point except fertilizer and Garland. More approvals, he said are coming, though.

## A locally-made option

The asparagus harvester, made by Harvestcorp Technology in Tillsonburg, will hopefully be ready for market next year. It uses cameras to identify the spears, judge ripeness, then a

decision is made to harvest, not harvest or harvest the spear and drop it. The machine uses cutters, then takes the harvested spears up a conveyor belt. It can also sort the harvested asparagus into two grades.

"It reduces the amount of labour in the grading room as well," said Steve Spanjers of Harvestcorp.

The machine runs autonomously and is battery powered. It can operate 24 hours per day, seven days per week.

The four-row model can harvest 30 acres per day.

## In the orchard

The Monarch, a 70-horsepower electric tractor which can drive itself between rows in an orchard was the leading-edge technology for orchard owners. It can allow an operator to pay more attention to the task being performed behind the tractor than where it's going.

"They can watch that much more closely that before," Baresich said.

It will also drive itself without an operator.

The Monarch will run for 14 hours performing light tasks, and eight on heavy tasks. It can re-



The Werkr electric tractor is a made-in-Canada solution for tractor automation. The company started with contracts from major lawn tractor manufacturers.



Chuck Baresich of Haggerty AgRobotics explains the function of a drone that is being tested for spraying applications.

# How far off is increased use of robots for field crops?



Steve Spanjers of Harvestcorp Technologies explained the workings of the automated asparagus harvester manufactured by the company.

charge in four to six hours on 220 volts. This unit sells for \$130,000, compared to a conventional tractor at \$70,000 to \$80,000. However, Baresich said there are no oil changes, oil filters and operating costs are lower. A traditional tractor also can't drive itself.

Asked about batteries, he said they are good for eight years.

"What's interesting is the battery that goes in there (in the future) will be significantly better than the one that came out," he predicted.

A robot on display from Finite Farms is designed to thin apple orchards. This task is essential as trees want to make 200 to 300 fruit, said Finite's Matt Stevens.

"Basically, you have to take a whole lot of fruit off as quickly as you can," he said.

The thinner is designed to be used after a chemical thinner has been applied and will cut off the tiny apples that it identifies as sub-par.

"The robot can see better than the human can, so we can start with marble-sized fruit," he said.

The operator can program the optimum number of fruit per tree, depending on the variety and end use of the apples.

## Horticulture uses

Toryn Boyle, manager of the Simcoe research centre, has been working with Haggerty to assess the Naio Oz's practicality in the field by comparing two squash plots, one tended by the robot and one by conventional means.

"We're trying to build a framework to assess these machines," said Jason Gharigo of Haggerty.

Boyle said some experimentation was needed initially to set up the cultivator on the Oz.

"The robot has automation systems that allow it to correct,"

Boyle said, explaining it will adjust till depth and if it's off track.

Initially, the machine got stuck a lot, and he had to go into the field and adjust it using an app on his phone. Once adjustments were made, there have been fewer problems.

## Made in Canada, eh!

While many of the robots were imported from the U.S. and Europe, a home-grown industry was also on display. Besides the asparagus harvester, an orchard scanner that uses AI to assess the condition of the trees and make thinning recommendations was developed in Toronto, and Werkr Tractors is based in Kitchener/Waterloo. The latter product is an electric tractor with an optional autonomous mode.

## How far is this from reality?

Hagerty AgRobotics had nine Oz robotic tractors, which is a small unit that will perform a variety of tasks and is scaled for work on small farms or market garden operations, out this year. The Burro, a small unit which can run bins of fruit from the orchard to a processing centre or larger wagon, is in use on several farms.

The dealership receives weekly calls from growers interested in making the switch. The technology is advancing rapidly, and Baresich believes it's on the cusp of becoming practical.

Part of his company's job is evaluating the new technology as it comes to market.

"We have to be honest with the grower," he said. "It's not that they (manufacturers) can't get there, it's just they need refinement."

"We're right at the beginning of robotics in agriculture," said Stan Baer of Werkr. "It's going to look a lot different in 10 years than it does now."



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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 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.



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

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 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

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# The Hunter Brothers' national tours deepen their kinship with other farmers across Canada



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

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, although 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."

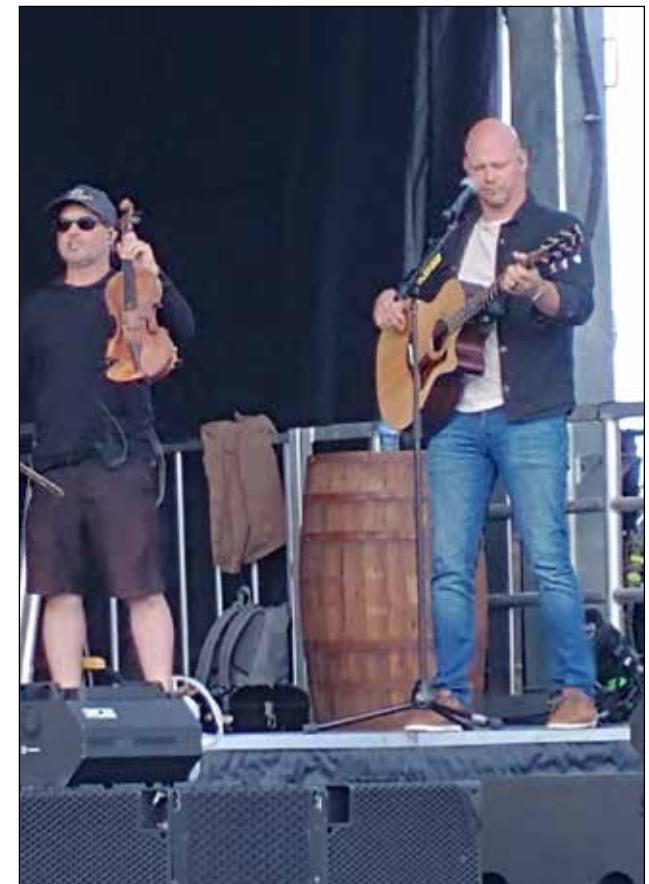
They laughed when asked about their impressions of Ontario farms.

"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 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



**Brock Hunter practicing during the band's sound check at the Paris Fair.**

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.



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# From firefighting to farming, an adventure for Brant woman

By Brenda Moser

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 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."

—“

**McMorrow purchased a property on River Road, Brantford and had five horses and three miniatures.**

”—



**Joanna McMorrow has a calming effect on all of her farm friends and this beauty is just one of them.**

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.

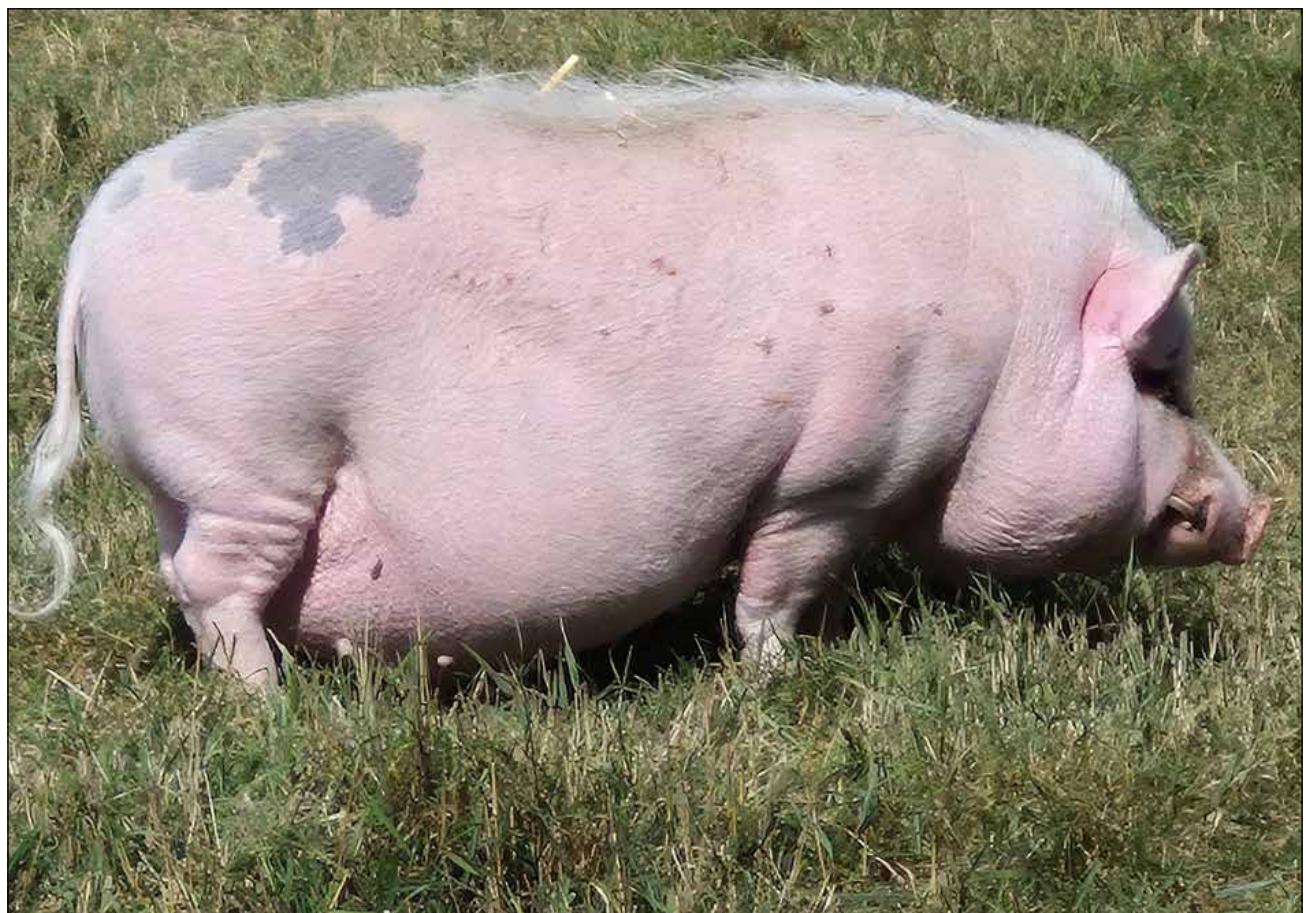
"I love the outdoors."

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.



**Her pot belly pig fits right in at Savvy Grit Ranch and loves a photo op! He is definitely not under fed.**

# From firefighting to farming, an adventure for Brant woman

"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](mailto: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.



McMorrow's sheep and goats certainly aren't shy and more than happy to pop their heads out and say Hi!



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# Tobacco board continues to advocate for members

**By Tamara Botting**

When it comes to agriculture in Canada, tobacco is a bit of an anomaly, because it doesn't really matter whether you talk about it in terms of provincial or national production – the bulk of the growing happens in Norfolk and Elgin counties.

"As far as I know, there are no longer any (Canadian) tobacco farmers outside of Ontario," said Anthony DeCarolis, adding that while there were some in Quebec back when he was a kid, he's fairly certain they're all gone now.

DeCarolis is chair of the Ontario Flue-Cured Tobacco Growers Marketing Board, and a fifth-generation tobacco farmer; he's based in Walsh.

The board represents approximately 130 farmers, who grow about 45 million pounds of tobacco on approximately 17,000 acres each year.

"It's more acres than before," DeCarolis said. "We were higher pre-COVID, and then it dropped down, and now we're coming back up. But I would say we're getting pretty close to maximum capacity for the growers that are left; there's not a lot of room left, unless we start buying more infrastructure."

Even if Canadian tobacco growers were to increase their capacity, it would have minimal impact on the industry worldwide.

"What happens here doesn't really affect anybody else," DeCarolis said. "We're a relatively small nation as far as tobacco production goes."

According to the World Health Organization, China, India and Brazil are the top growing

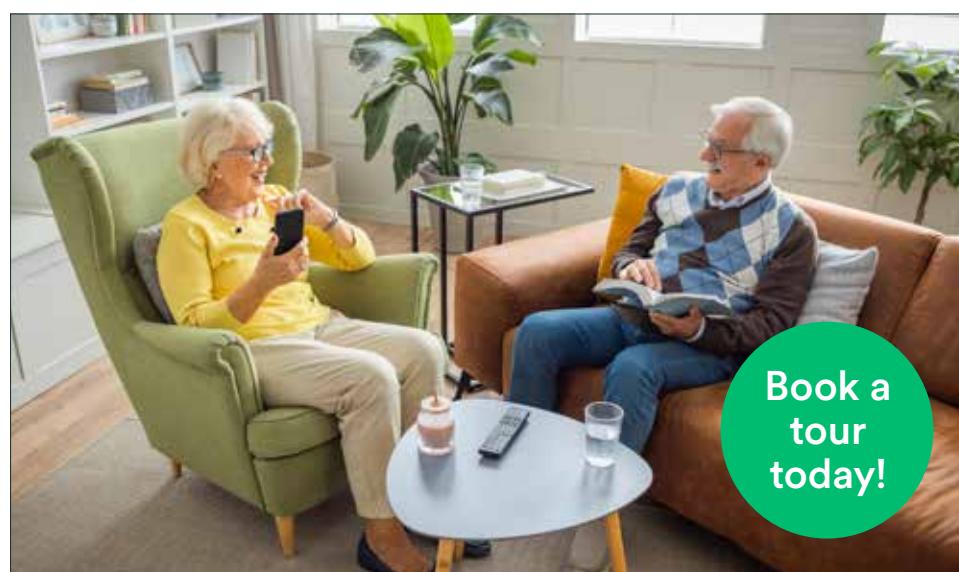


**Anthony DeCarolis is chair of the Ontario Flue-Cured Tobacco Growers Marketing Board, and a fifth-generation tobacco farmer; he's based in Walsh.**

nations in the world, and they grow billions of pounds annually.

Tobacco is used in products like cigarettes, cigars and chewing tobacco.

"The type of tobacco that we grow here in Canada is almost exclusively used in cigarettes," DeCarolis said.



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# Tobacco board continues to advocate for members

In Canada and a number of other countries, the demand for tobacco products is on a slow decline, and as a crop, it has a much-reduced role in Canada compared to even 30 years ago.

But as DeCarolis pointed out, globally tobacco is a multi-billion-dollar industry, and in Canada specifically, it's "still a legal product that brings a lot of money into the area, and we hope that it can continue to be a profitable product, and the community can benefit from it."

There are plenty of roadblocks along the way.

"Tobacco is kind of the black sheep of the agricultural community, and we don't always get the support from the various levels of government that other mainstream crops would get, politically or (with) research grants and stuff like that," DeCarolis said. "So, we are on our own a bit more than other commodities would be."

After the Canadian government's Delhi Research Station was closed in 2012, the tobacco board – in partnership with the domestic buying companies – formed the Canadian Tobacco Research Foundation (CTR).

"Both sides of the industry realized the importance of keeping research going," DeCarolis said.

"The CTRF has two major roles. One is breeding – so, creating new varieties to grow, to deal with new challenges and diseases, and increasing yield," he said. "The other half is crop protection agents, which is basically experimenting with different practices and more so different chemicals and pesticides and herbicides being used either on other types of crops (in Canada) or on tobacco in other countries."

DeCarolis explained that the foundation will do testing to determine the efficacy, and if it proves to be successful, they'll work with

the companies to try and get the label expanded for use on tobacco in Canada.

"We don't really get any government-funded research. (The provincial and federal governments) aren't researching things for us like they would for other main-

stream crops. So, we're left to our own devices to do our own research and development," he said.

Research is a really important arm of the organization, because it helps the Canadian tobacco farmers "stay competitive as far as being efficient and having ever-increasing yields, just like every other farming commodity. You're constantly chasing those higher yields, and there's always new pests coming online, new funguses, new diseases."

He said that even if the research shows that a particular chemical, pesticide, herbi-

cide, etc. is effective, that doesn't automatically mean it will become available for use.

As previously noted, "The size of our industry is not very big. So, it's hard to convince the manufacturer or the licensee to come and bring it here, because we're kind of a small market; they tell us there's better places to spend their money," DeCarolis said.

On top of that, the Canadian regulatory system, the Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) "puts a very high bar on getting agricultural chemicals approved, which is discouraging to the registrants."

DeCarolis said, "Canada's got a bit of a reputation for over-regulation ... It is difficult for the Canadian farmer – not just tobacco (farmer) – to compete with the world when we have much more layers of red tape and less access to possibly the best crop protection agents out there due to our regulatory situations."

What all of this boils down to is, "Not only is it a small market, but it's a tough nut to get into in the first place," DeCarolis said.

Flumetralin is just one example of a product that the tobacco board is still trying to get approved for use in Canada; it's a semi-systemic growth inhibitor used for sucker control in the United States and across the world.

As DeCarolis told Norfolk Farms in June 2024, "It stays in certain areas of the plant when you apply it, so it lasts longer ... What we are using now is contact only; it falls on the plant, the chemical burns some of the plant tissue on the surface and that's the end of it."

A year later, and "We're trying to get it here; it's been a very difficult road," he said.

When it comes to tobacco farming in Canada, it's not just the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture that acts as a regulator, but also the Ontario Ministry of Finance.



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# Tobacco board continues to advocate for members

"So, we have two government ministries watching us," DeCarolis said.

With the Ministry of Finance, tobacco farmers "need to be licensed, and then you need to report where your fields are, how big the fields are. Part of the licensing is you need to tell them who the buyer of your crop is – you

can't just grow crop on speculation. They want you to have a home for it before you plant it. And then they also do inspections during the harvest season to make sure that there's no diversion happening to an illicit market."

DeCarolis said the board advocates for its members with the government, trying to high-

light the parts of the system that aren't working well, or the scenarios that are possibly not being handled properly.

In this, DeCarolis said, the tobacco board isn't really different than any other enterprise.

"Every business owner in Canada would prefer less oversight and less regulations.

We're always looking to cut the red tape and streamline things," he said. However, it appears there's little room for much to change.

"The government's decided that this industry needs more regulation and oversight," he said.

While the tobacco board is forging its own path in a lot of ways, there are instances where it works for the same goals as other commodities.

"We are a directing member of FARMS (Foreign Agricultural Resource Management Services)," DeCarolis said, adding that the tobacco board is constantly working with FARMS to try and improve the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP), and making sure things go smoothly with the host countries.

"Labour is always a thing we're lobbying (for), advocating (for), and maintaining," he said.

While there are plenty of people who don't understand why temporary foreign workers are being brought into Canada for agricultural work, "It's actually a really good program," DeCarolis said. "We spend time defending it to people that don't understand it."

# Bobbi Ann Brady



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# Original Junior Farmers of Ontario “Centennial Project” continues into 2025 with additional Century Farm signage

**By Diane Baltaz**

What began as a Junior Farmers' Association of Ontario (JFAO) project as a Canadian Centennial project in 1967 continues into the 21st century.

In 1967, the JFAO recognized interested families that had working farms for at least 100 consecutive years with a designated metal sign to post by their laneways. The metal signs featured a red barn under a multi-coloured abbreviation of Ontario along with 1967 inscribed on it. Because the “O” in Ontario was larger than the rest of the letters, the signs were sometimes nicknamed as “O-Century Farms.”

The Century Farm sign project remained popular long after 1967, and continued into the millennium. Constructed of aluminum, each sign measures 16 by 19 inches (40.6 by 48.26 cm) and is identically printed on both sides, with the JFAO logo replacing the 1967 inscription. They are also available in French.

As Canada passed the 150-year mark in 2017, new century farms arose, in addition to farms that have remained in the same family for more than 150 years or even 200 to 250 years.

To celebrate these milestones, the Junior Farmers Association released

additional “ad-on signs” of 125, 150, 175, 200 and more recently, 225 years. These ad-on signs are erected underneath the original Century Farm sign.

The JFAO website states that these signs were custom designed by Junior Farmer member Becky Bouwmeester, with other members creatively writing the slogans. The add-on signs are offered in black and white, and are designed to hang under the Century Farm Sign.

In order to be designated as an Ontario Century Farm, owners must follow certain criteria. Direct descendants of the same family must have owned the farm for 100 consecutive years, and still be living on the farm and actively farming it. The application to the JFAO head office in Guelph must be accompanied with copies of land registry records, or have their documentation verified by the JFAO Provincial Director for the area where the farm is located.

The current cost per sign is \$100 plus shipping according to the JFAO website. Ad-on signs cost \$50 plus shipping.

Contact information regarding the program is available online at [www.jfao.on.ca/contactus](http://www.jfao.on.ca/contactus)



This century farm sign at the Rick and Joanne Boyce farm near Kelvin also has an add-on sign indicating 125 years. The Boyce family farmed the land since 1864.

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# Norfolk Woodlot Owners Association: Stewards of Southwestern Ontario's largest treed acreage

By Diane Baltaz

The Norfolk Woodlot Owners Association (NWOA) has multiple reasons why local tree lovers should join them. In a nutshell, they are: make friends, enjoy being amongst trees and wildlife, sequester carbon and learn how to boost your income through proper woodlot management and harvests.

"Enjoying Ontario woodlands is the number one benefit of the Norfolk Woodlot Owners Association," said NWOA president John DeWitt over a cup of coffee.

With him were two others from the NWOA executive – treasurer Eric Ferguson of Waterford and secretary John Morrisey. Disarming and full of tree lore, this tree-savvy trio is keen on sharing the NWOA's aim of protecting woodlots and the wildlife within them.

Founded in 1996, the Norfolk Woodlot Owners Association strives to represent woodlot owners and connect them with resources related to woodlot management. In 2023, the NWOA became a chapter of the Ontario Woodlot Association (OWA) to enable access to additional resources and support, including its quarterly, the Ontario Woodlander.

"We're mutually dependent upon each other for registrations and other advantages," said Ferguson.

The Ontario Woodlot Association (OWA) is the not-for-profit, grassroots organization which promotes tree restoration, management practices and advocates for healthy forest ecosystems throughout the province. Its 21 chapters include woodlot owners, individuals, forestry professionals and organizations that support its goals.

The OWA defines a woodlot as, "any private or community-owned tract of land including all woodlands, wetlands and forest-forming hab-



President John DeWitt with the BBQ Master at a recent NWOA event.

itats." 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, wind-breaks, plantations to Christmas tree plantings.

Both the OWA and the NWOA websites state two additional distinctions about this region.

Norfolk has Southwestern Ontario's largest treed landscape, with approximately 25 per cent of its area covered by woodlots, most of which are privately owned. Also, the county lies within the heart of the Carolinian forest zone of Southwestern Ontario, boasting species that usually cannot be found elsewhere in Canada, such as sassafras and pawpaw.

"We've got the most tree coverage with unique Carolinian species," said Morrisey. "We have many plantations from the last century,



Leslie Sampson of Coyote Canada spoke at the 2025 NWOA annual meeting in Delhi.

when pine was planted in rows after a time when much of the county was a dust bowl (after the Norfolk Sand Plain's forest cover was destroyed at the turn of the previous century)."

These distinctions attract OWA members from elsewhere to Norfolk's events, eager to learn new ideas or enjoy a different landscape as part of the 100-plus annual activities that happens through the association and its chapters.

The Norfolk chapter educates their members on sustainable forest growth and updates such as available management and certification programs, sustainable harvest methods and local forestry issues.

Members also use the association as a resource to ensure they receive fair market value for timber, gain information on loggers working

**"Enjoying Ontario woodlands is the number one benefit of the Norfolk Woodlot Owners Association,"**

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# Norfolk Woodlot Owners Association: Stewards of Southwestern Ontario's largest treed acreage

in the county and foresters available for marking woodlots for sustainable harvests.

"We're a group of individuals who want to see land properly looked after," said DeWitt.

Much of this activity happens at the annual general meeting, held on the first Wednesday of every March at the Delhi German Hall, with guest speakers, vendor and forest information exhibits and member sharing.

"We have a social aspect with our field trips and meetings at the Delhi German Hall," said Morrisey. "Human beings are pack animals -- we need meaning and social interaction."

The association's tours through private and public forests looks at topics such as tree marking, commercial harvesting, species at risk, and the management of tree pests and diseases.

Past site visits include Backus Woods, area nurseries, a laminate factory and a pallet plant in two adjoining counties, a genetic chestnut conservation centre and the 50-hectare De-Cloet Forest. There are also identification tours of winter buds: "It's the best time to identify trees and there are less bugs," said DeWitt.

Morrisey added, "The Norfolk Woodlot Owners Association shares tree knowledge. It doesn't just promote woodlots, but also the provision of corridors between woodlots for wildlife to move about."

Raised in New Brunswick, Morrisey worked one summer at a Delhi area tobacco farm in his teens, only settling near Silver Hill 17 years ago. "We lived all over North America but Norfolk is



NWOA is a grassroots tree stewardship association run by members such as (left to right) Eric Ferguson, John DeWitt and John Morrisey.

the nicest of all places with its social activities and landscape."

Morrisey found the association's management principles and information sharing to be



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# Norfolk Woodlot Owners Association: Stewards of Southwestern Ontario's largest treed acreage

"attractive." The group also helped his bush, which had a large planting of Scotch pine within it. A member assisted him in obtaining its free removal. The result enabled Morrisey to develop his bush with more Carolinian species and ensure its healthier growth.

DeWitt grew up near Orno, owns a bush and lives in Simcoe. During part of his career, he raised tree seedlings for use in Canada and overseas. He joined the NWOA in 1998.

The NWOA accomplished much in woodland enhancement since its first annual meeting,

held at Lynedoch United Church in 1997 with 50 people in attendance.

"The NWOA had a high profile at that time due to the Ministry of Natural Resources (which) was in the process of giving up southern Ontario forest management responsibilities. This helped create NWOA and many other such organizations across Southern Ontario," DeWitt wrote in an email.

But the group maintains an active profile. They provide input on the county tree bylaw, Norfolk fire prevention guidelines, landowners' rights and supporting the Norfolk Environmental Stewardship Team (NEST) youth internship program.

They work with other groups such as the Norfolk Federation of Agriculture, the Norfolk Field Naturalists and the St. Williams Conservation Reserve.

The group liaises with Norfolk Forest Superintendent Adam Biddle, whom DeWitt said is "integral to NWOA's flow of any invasive species that are 'invading' Norfolk County," such as the hemlock wooly adelgid and oak wilt.

"Then NWOA checks it out from a number of sources such as the Invasive Species Centre and reports it to members via a newsletter," added DeWitt.

The annual membership fee is \$56.60, payable to the OWA. NWOA's website is [www.norfolkwoodlots.com](http://www.norfolkwoodlots.com), along with a Facebook page.



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# 'The fall really decides': Grape growers hopeful for a good harvest



The grape harvest in Niagara should start in mid-September.



Matthias Oppenlaender is the chair of the Grape Growers of Ontario.

**By Luke Edwards**

Each year as summer draws to an end, there's a period where Niagara grape growers have essentially done all they can to prepare their vineyards and simply wait to see what Mother Nature brings in the fall.

While 2025 brought with it challenges on several fronts for the industry, Grape Growers of Ontario chair Matthias Oppenlaender said this year could still prove successful even if yields are a little on the light side.

"All the costs, all the input has been done... we're all waiting for the harvest time and hopefully we have a good fall. That's really what sets us up well. The fall really decides," he said in an interview with Niagara Farms in mid-August.

Parts of Niagara had just received a rare downpour in what has been a mostly dry summer. Oppenlaender said grape growers have

been utilizing irrigation this summer, but were hoping for some more moisture in the days leading up to harvest. He estimated a start date of around Sept. 10 to 15 for the start of harvest, which would be more or less average, though with changing weather patterns it's a bit of a moving target.

"It's typical?" he said. "Nobody knows what's a normal, typical year to be honest with you, but it seems to be fairly normal."

Yields might be a little lighter this year than normal. Oppenlaender said a few cold weather events in the winter, along with the dry summer, are the main causes of that.

"We know that the whites, especially chardonnays, are light," he said.

And while they won't know until they start actually pulling the fruit off the vines, Oppenlaender said it could be a good year for quality.

"It's a little early but we're set up for a good quality, a lighter crop usually increases the quality," he said.

Over all, the chair said there's some optimism in the industry, despite ongoing challenges of rising input costs.

"There's a demand for grapes. We're thankful for the support the Ford government is giving the industry and especially the wineries, and sales seem to be good, especially VQA," he said

"There's some optimism, but it is challenging."

With a strong demand and lighter expected yields, Oppenlaender said they aren't expecting any surpluses in grapes this year.

And when the harvest does start, they'll be hoping for dry weather, with fairly average temperatures. Warm days and cool nights would be ideal.

But that's up to Mother Nature 



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# Hounds of Erie has winning formula for dogs, wine and cider

By Jeff Helsdon

This one's going to the dogs.

Although that saying typically carries a negative connotation, there is nothing adverse about Hounds of Erie, either in the dog-friendly facility or the products it produces. In fact, the quality of the products was recently recognized at the Canadian Cold Climate Wine Awards, taking several medals, including best of show and four golds in the sparkling class.

Owned by husband and wife Mat and Melissa Vaughan, the Clear Creek-area winery was started in 2018. Mat taught himself to make wine and cider and it developed into a passion that concentrates on using old-world wine making techniques.

"We started as a virtual winery," Vaughan related. "What that means is we had our equipment at another winery, actually it was Front Road Winery. We outgrew the space there and then relocated to our place here in Clear Creek."

The first product was Top Dog Hard Cider, followed by another cider before the wine started a year into the venture.

"We were waiting for our vineyard to start producing grapes," Vaughan said.

A few years later, eight varieties of cold climate grapes are grown organically on the farm. Although apples were grown initially, the trees were removed to allow the organic grapes since it's hard to grow apples organically.



**Hounds of Erie is likely the most dog friendly winery in the province with bowls for canine refreshment at most tables. Owners Mat and Melissa Vaughan encourage people to bring their dogs to their winery.**

The focus on quality grapes is attributed as the secret to the success of Hounds of Erie's wines.

"Taking good care of our grapes is where it starts," Vaughan said. "Working with the land,



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# Hounds of Erie has winning formula for dogs, wine and cider

working with the year you're given. Every summer is different so you have to work with what you have and focus on quality grapes. It's hard to make great wine from okay grapes."

Finding the grape varieties that grew best was a lot of trial and error.

"What works well in Niagara doesn't necessarily work here," Vaughan said.

He doesn't have an agriculture background, but has an interest in plant biology. He learned by "trial and error, talking to people who know more than me."

The remainder of the land that isn't in grapes or part of the dog park is rented out for cash crops.

The grapes grown on the farm are used in all the wines as there are no blends, but there are some specialty wines that have additions such as honey or blackberries.

And then there's the part going to the dogs. There's more to it than just the names of the wines and ciders – such as Top Dog, Dog House, Fox & Hound – the facility on the 7th Conc. ENR welcomes dogs.

"We create an environment that's more than dog friendly, it's dog encouraging," Vaughan said. "Most of our customers bring their dogs with them. This is a place for dogs to hang out, on leash or off leash."

There are slips and slides for dogs, a dog agility park is under construction and there are even dog events such as the Dogtana 500 race.

"We like dogs, we like wine, we like hard cider – if you combine them it doesn't seem like work," he said.

The Vaughans have a Great Dane and Palmerian husky of their own.

The tourism connection

Vaughan is also the vice-president for the South Coast Beverage Association. It rebranded last year after the directors realized they needed to include more businesses.

"It was recognized we needed to have our own tourism association," he said. "It extends beyond our wineries and involves restaurants as well."

Hounds of Erie builds on its environmental record as well. The pond on the property was completed with assistance from ALUS Norfolk, DU and Birds Canada.

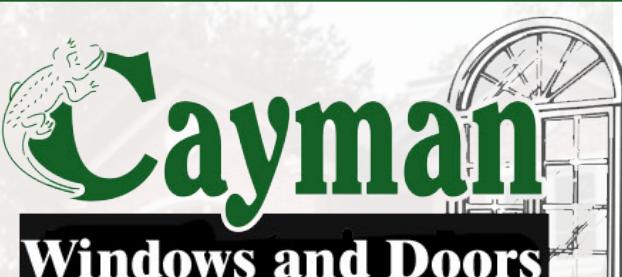
"We're becoming a popular destination for birders with the rare bird species that visit," Vaughan said. 



A flight of wine and cider samplers at Hounds of Erie can include a diversity of award-winning vintages. The vineyard that grows the grapes for the wine can be seen in the background.



The vineyards at Hounds of Erie are organic as the winery has evolved and knowledge about growing quality grapes has increased.



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# Celebrating Canadian Businesses: Cleanworks technology is making Canadian food safer



Cleanworks Corp. has had so much success with its patented process in sanitizing produce post-harvest that its efficacy is now being tested in the fields, pre-harvest. Results are showing that it is very effective, even resulting in a reduction in the amount of fungicide needed.

**By Tamara Botting**

They say an apple a day keeps the doctor away. It's perhaps fitting, then, that a Canadian innovation that kills food borne pathogens – and perhaps will be helping to sterilize medical equipment across the country soon – can track its roots back to an orchard.

Paul Moyer is a co-founder of Cleanworks Corp. However, he started as a fruit farmer in Vineland.

"I have farming in my heart. I love the land and working the land," he said.

Moyer is the eighth generation in his family to farm. In 1990, Moyer took over the family farm with his brother and mother.

For many years, they sold their produce at farmers' markets and the Ontario Food Terminal, but they wanted to expand.

"My brother was still at university, and I wanted to expand the opportunity for value added, so that's how we go into caramel apples," Moyer explained.

They took the apples that were perfect for consumption but not up to the standards of the fresh market – perhaps because they were misshapen, or the colouring wasn't ideal – and turned them into caramel apples, thus creating Moyers Apple Products.

"As a demand for the product grew, we decided we needed to expand, and that's where Court Holdings came into play," Moyer said.

Through the partnership, the business saw greater demand, and they subsequently expanded their facilities. However, a 2016 listeria outbreak – one that Moyers Apple Products didn't even experience firsthand – dealt a harsh blow to the caramel apple industry as a whole.

—“

*The units are engineered and manufactured in Canada.*

”—



Cleanworks Corp.'s patented process uses a specific mixture of hydrogen peroxide vapour mixed with ozone and UV light.

The overall dip in demand highlighted the fact that food safety is paramount in breaking into the larger Canadian market, and potentially the US market.

"If we were able to have the safest, longest lasting product, we would gain a lot of market share," Moyer said.

Not only that, but he feared that with repeated reports of pathogen outbreaks related to fruits and vegetables, the general public might start to believe that highly processed foods were safer.

"And I think that would be a tragedy, because nothing could be further from the truth," Moyer said.

"So, working with the University of Guelph, we developed a technology that sanitized apples for the caramel apples."

Arguably the biggest part of the innovation was the starting point they chose to set out from. Moyer said in the early stages of developing their new process, they kept asking themselves what they could do that was completely opposite from the established processes, which had proven to have gaps.

After all, "The electric lightbulb was not invented by the continuous improvements of candles," Moyer said.

The obvious answer was water.

"Everybody seems to think in order to sanitize something, you have to wash it," Moyer said. In general, though, "water is more of a vector for pathogens than it is a solution for pathogens."

What they landed on was developing a patented process that uses a specific mixture of hydrogen peroxide vapour mixed with ozone

and UV light. Moyer explained that when the hydrogen peroxide and the ozone gas is put through the chamber with UV light, the two substances will turbocharge, and break down to their individual components. The process sanitizes the food – it also helps prevent mold and mildew – and the byproduct of the process is oxygen and water.

"It's extremely green, it's extremely safe, and there's no chemical residue whatsoever," Moyer said, adding that there's no impact on the flavour of the food.

"On a molecular level, we make the product far, far safer than washing alone, by using significantly less water," he said (the process doesn't remove things like soil from the surface of the produce).

"In general, we can reduce pathogens – E. coli, salmonella, listeria and such – 99 to 99.9 per cent, making fruit and vegetables and other food items much safer," Moyer said.

Not only is the food safer to eat, but by drastically reducing mold and mildew, it lasts longer, too.

"We can increase the shelf life of produce about 20 per cent, if not more," Moyer said.

The caramel apples that started it all fall into the 'more' category – they went from having a shelf life of 14 days to over 30.

Moyer noted that because they'd had so much success with the process in sanitizing produce post-harvest, they decided to look at how it would work in the fields, pre-harvest. Testing on produce like spinach, strawberries and grapes has been very effective, even resulting in a reduction in the amount of fungicide needed.

The process has proven successful in the protein market, too, including being used on eggs, for the hatchery and the table.



# Celebrating Canadian Businesses: Cleanworks technology is making Canadian food safer

"It was developed for agriculture, and because it's so powerful and so effective, it was moved into the healthcare field," Moyer said.

In 2019, they were testing the process on norovirus and hepatitis with one of their units at Health Canada. When the pandemic hit the following year, "We were tasked by the Canadian government to see if our technology would work on COVID-19. It proved that it killed COVID-19 to a very high level. So, we were approved as a medical device in hospitals," Moyer said. "It's very powerful stuff. There are numerous pieces of our equipment in healthcare facilities and hospitals across Canada."

The technology has received a lot of accolades, including winning Canada's Food Waste Challenge for significantly reducing food waste through the technology and potentially greatly reducing the use of chemicals in the field; an award from the International Association of Food Protection for best new technology internationally for food safety; and the award for Ontario Centres of Excellence for New Technology.

"This technology certainly was born for a small reason, but it has done two things: it's become the highest, most effective way to kill pathogens on food items; and it has leapfrogged Canada to probably the very top country in technology for making food safer," Moyer said.

It's being used in locations across the country, from Vancouver to the East Coast, as well as in Central America and the European Union.



**Cleanworks Corp.'s patented process reduces pathogens – E. coli, salmonella, listeria and such – 99 to 99.9 per cent, making food safer; it also drastically reduces mold and mildew, meaning it lasts longer, too.**

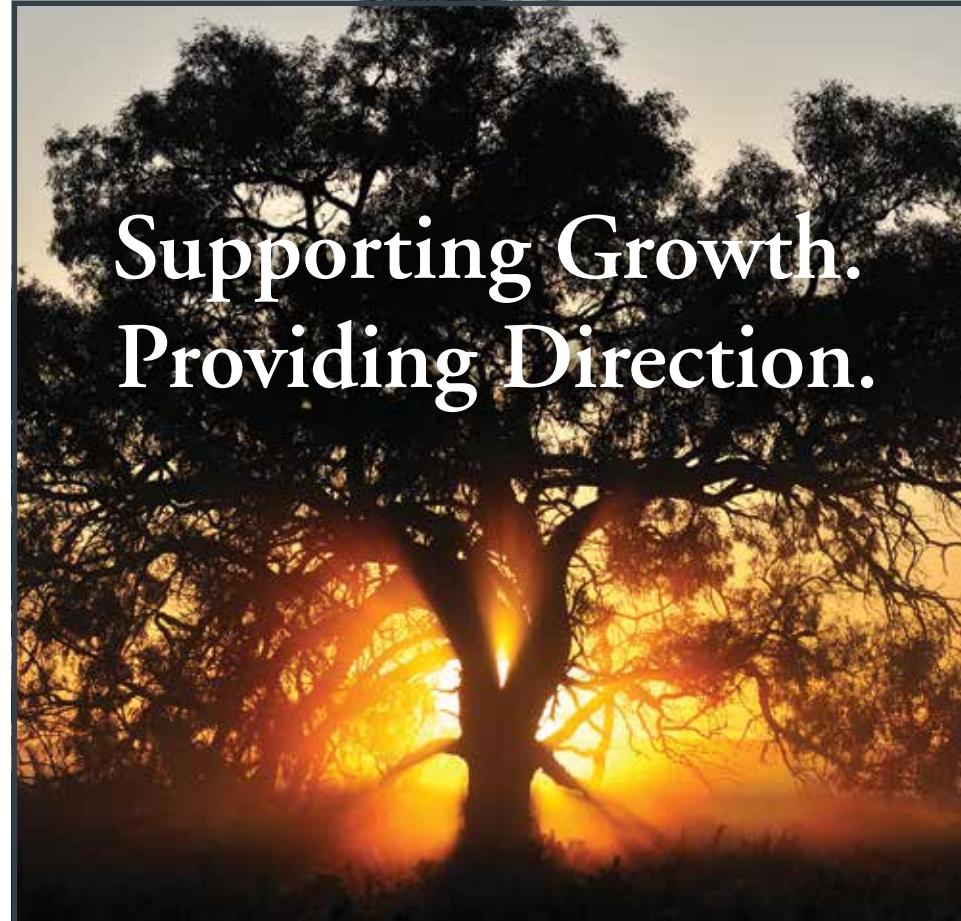
"(In) the food industry, we want to have as many tools in our toolbox to make food as safe as possible," Moyer said.

The units are engineered and manufactured in Canada.



Cleanworks Corp.'s process has proven successful in the protein market, including being used on eggs, for the hatchery and the table.

"It's certainly a Canadian-born technology that's absolutely changing the face of food safety, not just here in Canada, but globally. We're very proud of that. We're super happy to have been able to take some Canadian ingenuity and spread it around the world." 🌎



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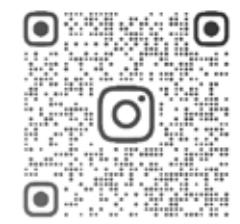
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# The Buy Canadian in grocery stores movement helps Ontario apples to be the first pick for health-conscious eaters

By Diane Baltaz

The vision statement of the Ontario Apple Growers (OAG) reads: Ontario Apples – the first pick for healthy consumers. According to the OAG'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 OAG 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 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 replace traditional favourites, such as the McIntosh and Delicious, with newer varieties.

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

**"The biggest competitor to the apple is the long produce aisle"**



OAG chair Chris Hedges of Vanessa.



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

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

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

"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 stands with produc-

tion – 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 million 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.

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# Huron Farmworkers Ministry – Lifting up migrant farmworkers as part of the Canadian family



"Padre" Enrique Martinez shares a chat with Mexican workers Luis Montes (left) and Miguel Medina Madera at the HFW site at St. John's Anglican Church, Tillsonburg



This sign outside St. John's Anglican Church in Tillsonburg outlines HFW services to Spanish-speaking farmworkers.

## By Diane Baltaz

In 2023, a Latin American migrant farm worker left a store in Norfolk County with his groceries – and with an Anglican priest at his side.

Reverend Enrique Martinez was present because this man requested help after previously experiencing issues navigating the store due to his inexperience with English and Canadian shopping customs.

Such accompaniment shapes Martinez's ministry, the Huron Farmworkers Ministry (HFM), an outreach of the Anglican Diocese of Huron, which stretches from Brant and Norfolk Counties to Lake Huron and Windsor.

That evening, the man said "Thank you for being here."

It's a common response from workers who need help adjusting to their time in Canada; and Martinez, an empathetic and naturally amiable person at heart, enjoys being of service.

But then the man burst out crying.

The depth of this man's pain about needing help to buy food touched Martinez. As a Latin American himself, Martinez knew that the Latino cultural has a deeply-rooted belief that men are supposed to be manly and self-reliant at all times, and that working for months in an alien land thousands of kilometers away from home is sometimes isolating.

"I was surprised to see him cry," recalled Martinez. "I know that Latino culture teaches men never to cry, and it's up to them to support their family. This is why we need to elevate

them to God and ask people to please respect these workers so that they can be part of a family."

Creating a sense of welcome and inclusion is thus the core of the Huron Farmworkers Ministry.

The London-based ministry works with migrant farmworkers, and when needed, with their employers in order to ensure that their physical and social needs are met. Services include education and translation assistance, spiritual and moral support, essential supplies and social interaction, homemade meals and community celebrations.

A locally-distributed HFW pamphlet reads, "We are a compassionate outreach ministry in the beautiful region of Haldimand-Norfolk. Our ministry serves migrant farmworkers who arrive each year to work in our local farming community. Our mission is to address the unique challenges faced by these essential workers and ensure their well-being, dignity and inclusion within our society."

"In Norfolk alone, the high season has an estimated 6,000 migrant farmworkers; and at peak harvest, this number is as high as 8,000 people," said Martinez.

The Huron ministry began during the pandemic, when the bishop assigned him to the parish of Long Point – consisting of five churches situated in Port Rowan, Woodhouse, Port Ryerse, Turkey Point and Vittoria – some of whose parishioners extended back generations. Martinez, who arrived from Columbia in 2005, began working with 100 local farm workers who were "trapped" in Canada due to COVID-imposed travel restrictions in 2020.

The 2021 growing season saw an "exponential increase" with 1,000-plus migrant workers seeking help monthly.

"And we had no funds to support them," recalled Martinez.

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# Huron Farmworkers Ministry – Lifting up migrant farmworkers as part of the Canadian family

The ethnicities of these Norfolk labourers are diverse: Latino, Caribbean, Mexican, St. Lucians, and Haitians.

"They're here together and need to feel like part of the family, but some have special language needs; or their words get mixed up and become misunderstood."

Martinez and volunteers supplied clothing, food, kitchen supplies, translation services, assistance with child benefit applications, personal protective equipment, bicycles and personal hygiene products.

In an essay published in November 2022, Martinez wrote, "Being an immigrant myself, I understood the challenges these workers faced because of different barriers such as language, culture, discrimination and expression of faith. Nevertheless, it was a ministry that I embarked upon with the blessing of my parish and diocese in order to provide a space of welcome as mandated by the Gospel: 'I was a stranger and you welcomed me. (Matthew 25:35)"

An ecumenical organization and a church in Simcoe provided funding, as well as some regional parishes. Martinez's group opened the Huron Farmworkers Ministry Centre in Delhi, but it has since closed due to funding issues.

The ministry obtained new partners, notably Toronto-based The Neighbourhood Organization (TNO), which opened an office on West Street in Simcoe in 2022. The TNO partnership provided more stable funding for HFM in addition to donations received from several area churches.

TNO also supports workers with translation, arranging transportation and legal services such as assistance with visas, parental benefits, pensions, and obtaining open work permits for those whose farmer-worker contracts did not work out.

The Huron Ministry added staff and established outreach centres in Simcoe, Tillsonburg, and Leamington and periodically visits Chatham. The centres are usually open later in the day, after the workers have finished work and come into town to shop.

Volunteers and staff at these sites distribute clothes, toiletries, serve homemade meals and listen to them as fellow members. Meals are sometimes accompanied with 20-minute workshops on legal, health, safety protocols that are delivered in the appropriate language allowing participants to learn while still having time to shop.

Martinez said that sometimes the Simcoe outreach -- which is open on Thursdays and Fridays -- attracts 350 workers daily. "That's 700 people in just a week -- the church is full between 3:30 to 8 p.m."

"Often 80 to 90 per cent of the workers' wages go home to family, even if they're often minimum wage," said Martinez. "They only keep only 10 to 20 percent here for groceries and other personal supplies. Getting donated goods allow them to save up for buying items such as a mobile phone or a good pair of shoes. They move the economy of each community in which they live -- and they pay taxes."

But not everyone can get to town when Huron Farmworkers Ministry is open. Therefore, this year, HFM obtained a van to distribute to food and supplies directly

to workers. Martinez said that it travels to area farms three to four days a week, visiting two or three farms per trip.

"We stay (at each farm) as long as we need to stay," said Martinez. "The farmer invites us -- everything is free. Farmers invite us because they want us to be there -- they know that we're going to work with them. We do as we're asked."

The farmer-ministry relationship has improved since the early days of COVID, when regulations closed off farms to visitors. Also, some farmers were suspicious of outside involvement after some media reports alleged that some farmers were abusing their off-shore help.

"We're here to uplift the worker," said Martinez. "That's the basis of our ministry and the heart of that work is bringing dignity to the people -- especially being with people who bring us Canadian food security. Sometimes they are not being properly treated -- so there is suspicion by some farmers."

"If you treat them with dignity they will work best for you. They're hard workers and they do the job; give them a need to be done in an hour and they'll do it."

Now farmers contact HFM for help when a worker's work or relationship with their employer becomes problematic.

"If there's a problem spiritually we try to lift them, work with and stay with them through the season; our ministry accesses mental health specialists if needed or we refer them to TNO."

"Spiritually, we try to make them part of the family up here," said Martinez. "Fifty per cent of their mental health is because they are seven to eight months away from the family and only with family for three months."

"If the problem is spiritual, there is the Eucharist and someone will work and stay with them through the season. They need someone who knows the worker's culture. Therefore, they can tell the farmer when there is a problem, 'It's their culture, not you.'"

Being away from home for months sometimes creates a sense of not belonging anywhere, said Martinez. He said that these ones feel, in Latino culture, as "mojodo", which translates as "wet", but is often used derogatorily to mean illegal or "not belonging here".

"And they feel that they do not belong to Canada," he said. "Then sometimes in Mexico, there's alienation from community members. They'll tell them, 'You're rich! You're not from here!' That's the biggest conflict they have, even if they can buy a house with their money. It's sad to see that."

"Spiritually, we just bring dignity to the workers," said Martinez about their desolation. "Specifically, we have the mass. Then they feel that God is still with them in the darkness and this part of life."

Huron Farmworkers Ministry also organizes celebrations such as Easter, Mothers' Day, Fathers' Day, Cinco de Mayo, Canada Day and Farm Workers' Appreciation Day to strengthen connections between cultures. Martinez also provides spiritual reflections in Spanish on Facebook.

When the worker experiences inclusion, he often prays for the patron (boss) and the employer's family, said Martinez.

"That's one of the most beautiful relationships -- the worker and the farmer. When they see the patron as a member of the family, they see a greater relationship than simply just the ones back home -- that means they feel more accepted here."

Huron Farmworkers Ministry has worked from St. Andrew Memorial Church on Foxbar Road, London after the diocese transferred Martinez to serve as that parish's pastor in 2024. To assist Martinez, Diana Rueda and an assistant coordinate HFM duties from the London location.

"I want farmers to allow the Huron Farmworkers as Christ said we're here to love each other ....so allow us to be here." 

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# Horse activities abound at Norfolk County Fair

**By Lisa Wright**

There will be plenty of horsepower October 7-13th in Simcoe as the kind with hooves, manes and tails compete at the Norfolk County Fair and Horse Show!

**First some perspective:**

Started in 1840, making it one of Canada's oldest agricultural fairs, the Norfolk County Fair and Horse Show is 27 years older than Confederation and 11 years older than Canada's first postage stamp. It also has a long history of horse events and competitions. At various times there have been chariot, chuck wagon, pony and Standardbred racing on the track, as well as Hackneys, Friesians, Saddlebreds and a nationally ranked Hunter/Jumper show, counting towards qualifying for the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair. The breeds and events have changed with the times, but horses continue to be a big part of the daily events at the fair.

To help you understand the various competitions being held this year, here's a brief guide to the class schedules and how they are judged.

**Youth & Hoof**

Things start off Tuesday, Oct. 7 at 1 p.m. with classes for junior riders just getting started in Youth & Hoof. These young riders and handlers are judged on their skill and how well their horse or pony responds to their cues while navigating obstacles and patterns. This is all about family and fun, finishing with a costume class. Cheer on your favourite little rider!

**Hunters**

Wednesday is for Hunters – but no camo or guns here! This is a competition with roots in the old English sport of fox hunting. Horses



**Farm Chore** is a competition at the Norfolk County Fair that involves drivers with a horse and wagon performing tasks that would be done by their forefathers decades ago. This includes backing into a loading dock

will have braided manes and tails, riders will be in formal English riding attire with clean, polished equipment. These classes are judged on a combination of looks and performance. Long before Uber and taxis, a "hack" was a horse you could rent to ride from one town to another or take for a leisurely tour through a city park. Modern Hack classes don't demand

any jumping, but the horse must be well-mannered and enjoyable to ride. Since fox hunting involves galloping through fields, jumping over any hedges, stone walls and fences in between, Hunter classes mimic this with natural-looking obstacles. Jump height is based on the experience of horse or rider. The emphasis is on



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# Horse activities abound at Norfolk County Fair

a seemingly effortless round, consistent pace, smooth turns and not hitting or knocking down rails. The best make it look so easy!

## Jumpers

Thursday morning starts with jumpers, and it's one of the easiest competitions for spectators to score as it's all about faults and time. Style doesn't matter. Jumps are colourful and include sequences, called "combinations", closer together. Knocking down a rail (or more on a single obstacle) incurs four faults, as does a refusal. A refusal can be an actual stop, or simply turning away and circling back. Riders with zero faults go on to a timed jump-off. Tight turns and a faster gallop are needed, but the fastest clean jump-off round (0 faults) wins. Riders have to gamble how quickly their horse can negotiate the course without a knockdown.

## Farm Chore

Thursday afternoon is the Farm Chore competition, imitating the type of work a team or single driving horse would typically be expected to do on a farm. The team must stand quietly to be hitched and perform their tasks efficiently. Single horses enter the ring already hitched (ironic as this may sound) and perform similar chores. These classes require skilled driving, well-trained horses and showcase how things were done before gas-powered machines!

## The big horses

The fairgrounds might shake as the big Belgians, Clydesdales and Percherons take over on Friday and Saturday, with classes for all ages of horses and their people. In the breeding classes, initially horses of the same age (by year) and same sex vie for the top ribbons. They are judged on movement and structure, otherwise known as conformation. First and second place of their class go on to compete for Junior (2 and under) or Senior (3 and over) Champion Mare or Stallion and ultimately Grand Champion and Best of Breed. Local breeder Dan Hayward will be competing with his Belgians. Dan grew up "sharing a fence line with the fairgrounds" and started showing saddle horses over 50 ago! In the Junior Showmanship classes, young handlers are judged on how well they present their horse, including a class for Small Fry less than 7 years-old. Often these handlers don't reach their horse's elbow! Singles, teams, unicorns, 4 and 6 horse hitches compete in harness. Unicorns at the Norfolk Fair? Not of the mythical or cartoon type: a unicorn hitch comprises three horses, a pair closest to the driver and a single out front. This requires well trained horses, a particularly brave lead horse and a talented driver. There will also be classes pitting these three breeds against each other both ridden and in harness. Which breed will win the Draft Horse barrel race? Friday, The Norfolk Fair hosts the finals for the Ontario Four Horse Hitch series, bringing together the ten best draft teams and drivers from the region and beyond.

## Western horses

Sunday features three different horse competitions, starting with the Western Horse Show at 9am. It is open to all breeds, and offers a wide variety of classes from Lead line for the wee ones to Masters for those 40 and over. Timed events such as pole bending, barrels and dash for cash are always crowd pleasers while Pleasure,

Trail and Horsemanship classes demonstrate focus, calm and accuracy.

## Going small

The equines get smaller as the Miniature Horse Show gets underway at 9:30 a.m.. Miniature Horses aren't ponies. They have been bred to have the same proportions as a horse but at less than 38" tall they are shorter than many dogs! Children often find learning basic horse skills less intimidating with Miniature Horses. This competition offers Halter, Obstacle, Barrel, Driving and Costume classes for juniors and adults.

## Teaming up

At 12:30 p.m. the Team Horse Pull gets underway. Teams are weighed upon arrival, with "light" teams weighing 3,400 pounds or less, combined. That's almost 1 1/2 tons of horseflesh. The heavy teams can weigh nearly two tons! Each team has two tries to pull a weighted skid, called a boat, a minimum dis-

tance, usually 12-15 feet. These horses can pull over three times their body weight with only vocal encouragement from their teamster. The Calgary Stampede record is 13,400 lbs. Will we see a new record set in Norfolk?

And last, but not least

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# FARMS

NORFOLK COUNTY - ONTARIO'S GARDEN

SECTION B / ISSUE 35 / FALL 2025

## Canadian government 'takes the threat of avian influenza very seriously'

By Tamara Botting

Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) is a serious threat, which is why the Canadian government puts a lot of effort into preventing it from spreading when it's detected.

The disease was first detected in Canada in 2004, at a commercial chicken breeder farm in British Columbia. HPAI was first detected in Ontario 18 years later, in March 2022. That year, there were 43 infected premises in the province.

"Since the initial year of the outbreak, the number of infected premises dropped significantly in Ontario and has continued to remain low," said Geneviève Trottier, Incident Commander with the National Emergency Operations Centre for HPAI with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA).

In 2023, there were five infected premises in Ontario, and in 2024, there were seven. So far this year, there have been six; in mid-September, Trottier said, "there are no current infected premises in Ontario."

The latest information on avian influenza detections, including the estimated number of birds in flocks impacted by province, is on the CFIA's website, <https://inspection.canada.ca/>.

"The Government of Canada takes the threat of avian influenza very seriously and is putting a lot of effort into stopping it from spreading in Canada," Trottier said. "When avian influenza is detected in domestic poultry, the CFIA implements strict movement controls and containment measures."

Please turn to page B2 →

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# Canadian government ‘takes the threat of avian influenza very seriously’



**Avian flu is a serious problem to farmers that can result in the destruction of entire flocks. The Canada Food Inspection Agency is staying vigilant watching for signs of an outbreak.**

In Canada, there is a requirement to report cases of avian influenza to the CFIA.

The Canadian government follows the internationally recognized standard ‘stamp out,’ for responding to avian influenza in domestic poultry, as defined by the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH).

## **The steps for the stamping out approach include:**

1. Depopulation of the animals that are infected, suspected to be infected, or exposed to avian influenza
2. Disposal of carcasses and associated animal products, such as manure, in a manner to prevent the transmission of the avian influenza virus
3. Cleaning and disinfecting of the premises

Trottier said the CFIA and other agencies coordinate these responses, and that stamping out “is a primary tool to manage the spread of avian influenza and mitigate risks to animal and human health as well as enable international trade.”

Furthermore, Trottier said these efforts are “rooted in a One Health approach, recognizing the interconnectedness of people, animals and the environment.”

She explained, “The One Health approach aims to improve Canada’s capacity to adapt to the emerging risks through early detection, active prevention, and rapid response to avian influenza outbreaks.

“This surveillance strategy extends across wildlife, domestic poultry, dairy cattle, and humans, in close collaboration with federal and

provincial governments, industry, academic and research institutions, Indigenous communities and international organizations such as WOAH.

“This ecosystem of partners forms an integrated network that allows Canada to detect threats early, act quickly and reduce risks to the economy, biodiversity and public health.”

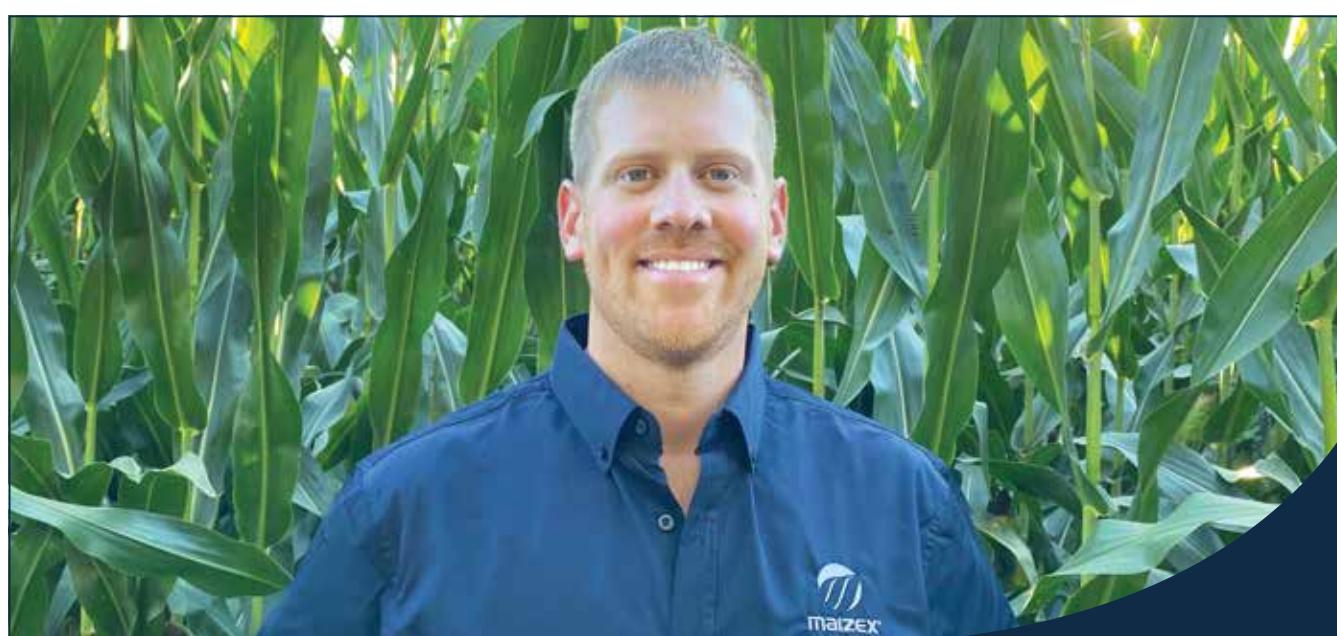
One of the CFIA’s partner agencies is the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness (OMAFA).

As Connie Osborne in the communications branch for OMAFA and Ontario Public Service noted, “We continue to work with the CFIA and industry partners to monitor and respond to avian influenza. To help protect the agri-food sector from avian influenza, we have invested over \$9 million to strengthen biosecurity, enhance testing capacity, and develop emergency preparedness resources.”

Osborne added, “Ongoing collaboration with federal agencies, other provinces and territories, and international partners ensures timely information sharing and alignment on bestpractices.”

Some of the most important partners in Canada’s efforts to monitor and control the spread of avian influenza are those on the front lines: the poultry and dairy producers, veterinarians, and industry associations.

As Trottier noted, these groups work together “to ensure proper biosecurity measures are in place and to facilitate rapid re-



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*In Canada, there is a requirement to report cases of avian influenza to the CFIA.*



# Canadian government 'takes the threat of avian influenza very seriously'

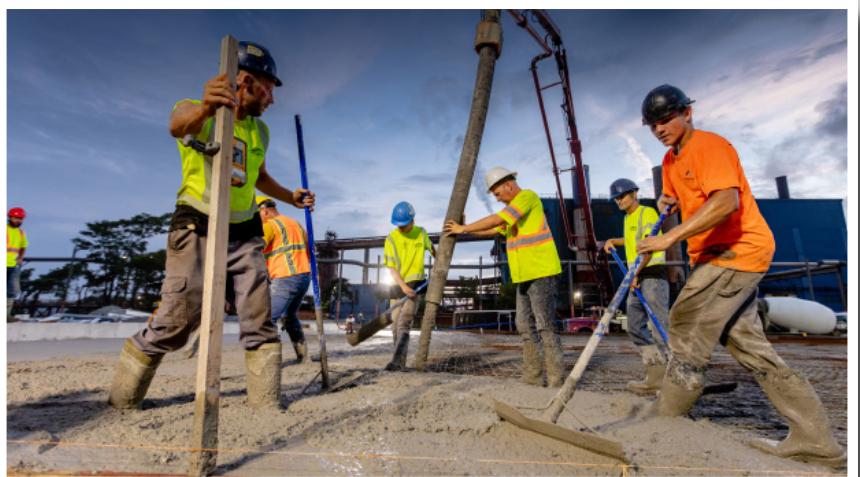
porting and containment of any suspected cases. This includes sharing best practices for preventing the spread of the virus, as well as making sure that producers have access to the necessary tools and knowledge to safeguard their flocks/herds and their own health."

She added that in striking the Avian Influenza Advisory Group, "the CFIA has solicited expertise from industry and the scientific and academic communities ... Representatives help to ensure that CFIA policies and action plans are sound. These consultations are ongoing and continue to provide valuable intelligence that helps to shape the CFIA's overall strategy to combat avian influenza in Canada."

Of course, infected animals in the wild are not respecters of borders, meaning that Canada's response to avian influenza can't be insular.

That's why Canada "is also involved in global efforts to monitor and control avian influenza," through collaborations with international bodies like the World Health Organization (WHO), WOAH, and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). These entities "share information and strategies for controlling outbreaks and preventing the spread of avian influenza," Trottier said.

Ultimately, "Our disease response aims to protect both public and animal health, as well as minimize impacts on the \$6.8 billion domestic poultry industry, and the Canadian economy." 



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# Building a business through her love of animals



**Kate Madrusan is 'right at home' with some of her farm friends...two-legged and four-legged...that she cares for through Kate Madruson's Farm Sitting service. They're always in good hands!**

#### **By Brenda Moser**

Pets can add so much to a home and soon become another 'member' of our family. We feed them, care for them and love them on a daily basis but, sometimes, we might need to leave them at home for work or holidays. You want to know that, if you can't be there for them, someone trustworthy and caring will be there to help you out.

I recently met the right person to fill this role ...Kate Madrusan.

Kate runs a fully insured farm sitting business in Norfolk County. She is available to provide dependable care for livestock, horses, poultry and family pets.

"I will be there when the owners can't and it is my goal is to give people the peace of mind in knowing that their animals will be well looked after."

Kate has been around animals her whole life and understands just how much responsibility goes into their care. She started her business when she saw a need in the community for a reliable service so people could take a break and step away from their farms. It could be for work, travel or emergencies and alleviates their minds in knowing that Kate will care for each farm's needs without any worrying that their 'family' members are in good hands.

"It gives owners that freedom while keeping their animals safe and cared for," adds Kate.

Kate will customize to each farm's routine. Some of her main services include feeding and watering, cleaning stalls, daily health checks... all while following the specific instructions of the owners. She summed it up perfectly when she said "I look after horses, livestock, poultry and pets – really, the whole farm family".

Kate has over 20 years of hands-on experience with a number of different animals.

"I focus on personalized care," she said. "I realize that every farm has its own way of doing things and I always make sure that I follow each individual owner's routine so that the animals always feel comfortable and everything remains the same".

I recently met Kate at one of her clients and she walked me through what a typical visit to this client might look like. There were cats to tend to, goats, chickens, horses, sheep...a variety of pets.

Her client stated, "Kate is very accommodating and organized. She is brilliant at individual animal feed care programs and always open-minded to learning new things. Her kindness and tenderness allows the animal to be receptive of her so there is no stress if the owner is away. I am very honoured to have Kate".

While Kate will take care of your pets when you are on holidays she will also visit if you simply want someone to tend to their care while you might be at work. "I have clients in almost anywhere in Norfolk County. I do a lot of dogs and cats local, in the vicinity of Delhi, nearer to where I live, but my main love and focus is for farm care".

Kate can supply references and answer any questions about cost. More information is available on her Facebook page - Kate Madrusan - where there is a contact phone number.

As Kate so aptly put it "I got you Norfolk County".

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# Sandy Shores Farms assists school in Guatemala



The roast pit and barbecued chicken is one of the main draws at the annual event held at Sandy Shore Farms to assist students in Guatemala. People attend from across Southwestern Ontario.

**By Jeff Helsdon**

A barbecue and auction held in southwest Norfolk assists at Sandy Shores Farm assists youth in Guatemala.

Held June 22 this year, the barbecue was a meal, auction and fundraiser all in one.

The connection to Guatemala is through Juliana Konrad de Pelaez, daughter of Robert

Konrad, who co-founded Sandy Shores Farm with his brother-in-law Ken Wall in 1986

Julianna went to Guatemala for three years through a university program with Canadian Mennonite University.

"I basically fell in love with Guatemala and said I'm going back," she said.



Students in the school built by Global Shores in Guatemala. This school provides opportunities for education that wouldn't otherwise exist for many of the students.

She was aware of programs where university students travel to other countries through non-profits and have a job there teaching for two months and applied. Enthralled with enthusiasm, she shared her vision with her family after returning.



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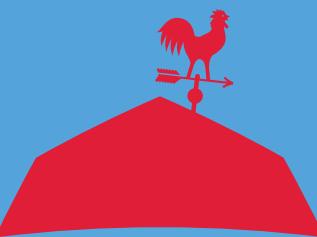
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# Guatemalan school built with aid from Sandy Shore Farms

"When I came back from Guatemala, they said why can't we do that with Guatemala," she recounted.

Julianna returned to the central American country and set up a school in the middle of the country, in the mountains about two hours from the capital of Antigua. Starting with one teacher in a one-room school in 2007, it has grown.

Initially Sandy Shore Farms was the sole supporter of the school.

"As people came to know more of what we were doing, they said they wanted to support it," she said.

As a result, Global Shore Opportunities was started by her parents and aunt and uncle with Julianna being the executive director on the ground in Guatemala.

Today, the one-room school has been replaced with two schools housing 325 students from pre-Kindergarten to Grade 12. The schools were built in a large part by volunteers from Ontario, who travelled there through Global Shore.

"The high school is streamed so you go into something specific," Julianna said, providing an example of accounting or teaching. "It's set up so they can work right away after graduating."

The education system in Guatemala has many public schools operated by the state, and private for-profit schools.

"What our school does is gets rid of all those barriers," Julianna said.

Going into more detail, she explained some students don't pay at all, some pay what they can and some pay full rate. Students attend the Global Shore school for many reasons, but learning English and wanting to attend a faith-based school are chief amongst them.

"You get rid of all the hierarchy and class system," she said of economic model used. "You have kids who would never be friends otherwise becoming close friends."

Guatemalan parents pay \$20 per month on average, which is a lot when the average income is \$500 per year. About 90 per cent of the students have full sponsorship.

Julianna met her husband in Guatemala, who is a pastor. The school starts with worship in the morning.



Students in the school built by Global Shores in Guatemala. This school provides opportunities for education that wouldn't otherwise exist for many of the students.

Global Shores just purchased land for a second school, about two hours from the first. It started with the church, house and school in one location and five students. Then it grew to 10 students, and now 25 in the third year.

The Canadian support

Hans Fros started the fundraiser, that is now the annual pig roast, in 2010 in his backyard.

"We took over the next year," Julianna said. "Every year it escalated and grew."

Today, the event is a pig roast, chicken barbecue and silent auction all rolled into one. Large event tents are set up at Sandy Shores on Front Road and about 500 people attend. Big ticket items such as helicopter rides, golf, and a Costa Rica vacation villa for a week are combined with smaller items

Cost of the evening is \$75, and the goal this year was to raise \$60,000 for the school.

Teachers from Guatemala attend the event and shared their stories about life there.

The barbecue is an important fundraiser for the schools.

"Even if we had full sponsorship of all the students and teachers, that would only be 50 per cent of our costs," Julianna said.

Outside of the dinner, people can sponsor a teacher or student in Guatemala for only \$50 per month. Julianna explained that participants pray for the person sponsored and send letters to them. While sponsoring students is popular, she said it is also important to sponsor teachers.

"You're allowing the person to stay on staff and partnering with them," Julianna said. 🌱

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# Weston Family Foundation's Homegrown Innovation Challenge sees four 'berry' strong contenders in final phase

By **Tamara Botting**

Four teams of innovators – from Ontario, British Columbia and Quebec – are each working towards the goal of developing a market-ready system to reliably, sustainably and competitively grow berries year-round and at scale in Canada with backing from the Weston Family Foundation.

This is all part of the Homegrown Innovation Challenge, the Foundation's first major initiative dedicated to agriculture technology and food production.

For over 60 years, the Foundation has invested in other areas for the well-being of all Canadians, including brain health and the microbiome, conservation and northern research.

The organization noted that "The Challenge is a natural extension of this work: by investing in Canada's ecosystem of talent and supporting bold, collaborative research that addresses some of our most pressing national challenges."

While the Challenge was being designed, "shifting global trade dynamics, climate change, and extreme weather events were intensifying the need for a more resilient, self-sufficient food system built right here at home."

Berries were chosen as the focus for the Challenge because they are a difficult crop to grow year-round, given Canada's long winters and short traditional growing season, while also being nutritious, culturally significant, and in high demand – most of the berries Canadians consume are imported.

"By choosing berries and testing new approaches to year-round production in controlled environments, we are addressing some of the toughest challenges in food production. And the innovations generated by our grantees – from lighting automation to microclimate management – have the potential to be applied to other fruits and vegetables, making our food system/growing systems more resilient and sustainable," the Foundation noted.

The Challenge was rolled out in three phases: Spark, Shepherd and Scaling; the four teams remaining are currently in the Scaling phase.

The teams are:

- Simon Fraser University and collaborators, including BeriTech Inc.; principal applicant: Dr. Jim Mattsson. "Their approach to maximizing yield combines greenhouse production with innovative techniques to manipulate plant physiology and carefully timed cropping cycles through intercropping blueberries, blackberries, and raspberries," the Foundation's website states.

- Toronto Metropolitan University and collaborator Montel Inc.; principal applicant: Dr. Habiba Bougerara. This team is developing a modular, vertical farming system focused on year-round raspberry production. "One of the key features of this farm will be a patented pollination and air circulation system to achieve consistent autonomous pollination," the Foundation's website states.

- Université Laval and collaborators, including Cultivar; principal applicant: Dr. Martine Dorais. This team is scaling a modular aeroponic platform for year-round strawberry production and to provide seedlings for indoor, greenhouse and open-field growers. "By integrating phenotyping and microbiome expertise, the team aims to increase their yield and significantly improve energy efficiency – plus grow healthier plants and tasty fruit – with no pesticide residues," the Foundation website states.

- University of Guelph and collaborators, including Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC); principal applicant: Dr. Youbin Zheng. This team "is scaling a hybrid greenhouse-vertical farming system designed to maximize energy efficiency and eliminate fossil fuel use for heating and dehumidification. This innovative approach uses natural sunlight and smart lighting that automatically adjusts to electricity prices and recycles and reuses heat, reducing

costs and carbon footprint," the Foundation website states.

Each team will be awarded up to \$5 million over three years to build and demonstrate their system at farm scale in Canada. At the end, there will be two \$1 million prizes awarded: the Technology Breakthrough Winner (for the team that has demonstrated the greatest technological innovation) and the Overall Challenge Winner (for the team that has best met the parameters of the challenge). These prizes may be given to two different teams, or the same team.

The Foundation noted, "Even for those not receiving a prize at the end, each Scaling Phase team benefits from the Challenge's significant funding, communications support, networking and mentoring opportunities, and the opportunity to advance solutions that can contribute to the future of Canadian agriculture. We hope that all these teams win in the sense of getting their solutions to scale, whether they win one of the remaining prizes or not."

Throughout the process, the teams have been encouraged to share knowledge and experience with each other.

"Real-world innovation doesn't happen in silos," the organization noted. "The Challenge was designed to promote cross-sector collaboration and to mobilize Canada's full ecosystem of homegrown talent: to build a community of innovators who can learn from one another and exchange insights. Even if the final solutions look different, the shared learning helps move the whole sector forward."

At the end of the Challenge, the teams own all of the intellectual property they create.

"The Foundation takes a collaborative approach to philanthropy, and our role is to provide the conditions – funding, support, visibility – for innovation to flourish. Our hope is that the technologies and approaches developed by the grantees throughout this Challenge will be commercialized or shared in ways that benefit our nation's growers and strengthen our food system as a whole, and accelerate Canada's path to leadership in agriculture," the organization said.

The Foundation expressed gratitude for the dedication of the teams, partners and experts who have worked on turning concepts into real-world solutions.

"Canada has a remarkable ecosystem of homegrown talent in food and agricultural innovation ... Together, we are creating the conditions for Canadian-led solutions that will benefit growers, consumers, and communities for years to come. This is where innovation meets impact."

While the Foundation doesn't have any new agriculture-specific initiatives to announce at the moment, opportunities where philanthropic support could make a meaningful difference are regularly reviewed. Also, the Foundation offers funding to other areas that are relevant to agriculture through its Environmental Stewardship work, such protecting the Canadian Prairie Grasslands and soil health on agricultural lands.

Updates on the Foundation's work and any future opportunities will be shared online at: [www.westonfoundation.ca](http://www.westonfoundation.ca) 




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# OFA asking municipalities to reconsider farm tax rates

**By Tamara Botting**

It's been almost ten years since the last Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) assessments were done.

"We've been in a bit of a holding pattern," said Ben LeFort, senior policy analyst for the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA). "We are waiting and watching what will happen there."

Whenever the new assessments are done, it might help improve a longstanding issue that's been impacting most agriculturally zoned properties across the province.

"On the flip side, it could get even worse," LeFort said.

There are two main components that make up a property tax bill in Ontario: the MPAC assessment (which is supposed to be done every four years) and the tax rate, which is set by the municipality.

With agricultural properties, municipalities collect the full residential tax rate on the farm residence and the first acre of the property; after that, individual municipalities have the discretion to set the agricultural tax rate – which is applied to the remainder of the property – anywhere from 0 to 25 per cent of the residential tax rate.

"The municipality is going to collect what they need to collect. The main factor we're concerned about is who are they collecting more from, and who are they collecting less from," LeFort said.

The issue, according to the OFA, is that agricultural properties' MPAC assessments jumped drastically – in some areas, over 60 per cent – while comparatively, other types of properties, like commercial and residential, only increased one or two per cent.

So, if a municipality opts to collect the full 25 per cent from the agricultural properties, chances are, they'll be paying a greater share of taxes than other classes of properties, LeFort said.

"It's become an arithmetic issue."



**Balancing residential versus farm tax rates is a challenge municipalities must grapple with. Farmers have seen the value of farms skyrocket and brought taxes up with it.**

So why are the assessments on agricultural properties so high?

It comes down to supply and demand.

The reality is, "We lose farmland every year," LeFort said.

Many municipalities are seeing developers seeking to purchase agricultural properties and turn them into residential developments. Land suitable for agricultural purposes is limited to begin with, and once it's developed, it's gone – meaning that the farmland that's left becomes even more in demand.

While MPAC's assessments on agricultural properties' values are based on farm-to-farmer sales, "The more the demand there is for farmland from any source, the higher the sale price will be," LeFort said. "It's impossible to strip that out of the equation."

LeFort said that in the OFA's opinion, this issue isn't really something MPAC can address; "MPAC takes its orders from the province."

And while some may want to point fingers at the Ontario government, the fact is, property assessments are going to vary across the province.

"What's happening in Hamilton will be different than what's happening in Huron County, etc.," LeFort said.

Which means that ultimately, the individual municipalities' ability to set the agricultural tax rate is "the only realistic tool at this point" to minimize the impact that high property value assessments can have on agricultural properties.

"Municipalities can adjust their farm tax ratio – they have the perfect tool to address this issue, if they choose to. This is now a municipal decision," LeFort said.

While all of Ontario's municipalities could address this issue, the fact is that most don't, which is why the OFA is trying to get the messaging out that "municipalities where farm MPAC values have risen at a disproportionately higher pace than other property types should consider adjusting their farm tax ratio below 25 per cent," LeFort said.

It's important to note, though, that the OFA isn't asking that municipalities not charge any taxes on agricultural properties.

"We accept and realize they are going up," LeFort said. However, they're asking munici-



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# OFA asking municipalities to reconsider farm tax rates

palities to not put the brunt of that burden on a handful of farmers, and instead, apply a lower tax rate to slow the increase that agricultural properties are having to contend with.

LeFort acknowledges "It's a difficult decision for all municipalities across the province."

Because if a municipality decides to collect less tax dollars from farmers, they're going to have to make up the difference elsewhere to cover their budgets.

"There is that reality of the trade off – a lowering of farm tax would mean more taxes on residential, industrial and commercial properties. It's the co-ramification," LeFort said, adding that in most cases, residential properties make up the bulk of a municipality's tax base. However, he noted, when spread across multiple residential properties, the amount more that each household would pay would be much smaller than the steadily growing tax burden currently shouldered by a few agricultural properties.

Brant resident Larry Davis has been on the board of directors for the OFA for many years. A farmer himself, Davis lauds the work being done by the organization to try and address this taxation issue.

"In almost all municipalities in Ontario, where there is rural and urban, it will be disproportionate to the farmer," he said.

Davis said it's only right that farmland – besides the residence and first acre of property – is taxed at a much lower rate.

"Our properties generally don't need sidewalks and streetlighting ... and (our fields are) certainly not going to use a library," he said.

He echoed the concerns about how the prevalent practice of developers seeking farmland is continuing to drive up prices, and consequently assessment values.



Larry Davis.

Developers will have more financial means to present a larger offer than most farmers would have, he said, adding that he doesn't blame farmers who opt to sell to developers.

"Are you going to take the pot of gold, or are you going to work?"

Davis sees farmland being developed for housing as a losing situation all around.

Besides the taxation issue, it limits existing and future farmers' abilities to expand their operations, Davis said.

"We desperately need houses. But we can't continue to use farming soils," he said.

Moreover, the practice drives up the cost of the new housing, Davis said.

"They're going to put the price of the house that much higher, because they had to pay that much more for land."

At the core, Davis sees a need for the general public and especially those in political office to be better aware of the vital role agriculture plays in the production of the four Fs: food, fuel, fibre, and flowers, which in turn drive a significant proportion of Ontario's – and Canada's – economy.

He noted that if you're unaware, it's easy to look at a field that's 'empty' and think it's just sitting there doing nothing.

"But just wait," he said.

In the meantime, the OFA and the farmers it represents are also watching and waiting, to see what will come down the pike as far as new MPAC assessments are concerned.

As LeFort noted, "What the new assessment holds will determine whether this gets better or worse."

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# NFA presents scholarships to youth



The Norfolk Federation of Agriculture recognized its scholarship recipients at its summer barbecue. Left to right are: President Tyler Townsend, recipients Marshall Wiedrick, Max Feth, Olivia Smith, and Treasurer Dave Campbell.

## By Jeff Helsdon

Three youth were recognized by the Norfolk Federation of Agriculture through its annual scholarship program at the summer barbecue.

NFA President Tyler Townsend explained that the scholarships are a long-running program that has been in place for years. He said the purpose is "to make a better future for the students, whether they're on a farm or working in the agriculture community." Each recipient received \$1,000 towards their studies.

The recipients have diverse aspirations for their futures.

Marshall Wiedrick is attending the University of Guelph to earn a Bachelor of Science in agriculture. His goal is to take over the family farm, which is a hog operation.

Max Feth is studying business agriculture at Georgian College in Barrie. It's also his goal to return to the family farm, which is a ginseng operation.

He sees the need for value-added products in the ginseng industry, and explains he hopes to "learn new tactics that are better than the other farms."

Olivia Smith doesn't live on a farm, but her father works at the Ontario Crops Research Centre in Simcoe. She is attending the Ridgetown Campus at the University of Guelph, studying agriculture. Her goal is to work in crop research and genetically modified crops. 

## Advice to avoid being a farm theft victim

### By Jeff Helsdon

Police are asking for the public's assistance following a recent theft of a loader from a Norfolk County farm, and shared advice to avoid such incidents.

On Monday, August 25, at approximately 11:44 a.m., Norfolk County Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) received a report of stolen farm equipment from a Lynedoch Road property in Delhi. The investigation determined that between 12 p.m. on August 23, and 9 a.m. on August 24, 2025, one or more unidentified individuals entered the property and removed a dark green and black Shandong Daou Heavy Industry Machinery front loader, marked with "DA20F" on the loader.

Police are actively conducting an ongoing investigation and are appealing to the public for assistance. Anyone with relevant information is urged to contact the Norfolk County OPP at 1-888-310-1122, or Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS (8477) or leave an anonymous online tip at [www.helpsolvecrime.com](http://www.helpsolvecrime.com).

"Incidents involving stolen farm equipment are not an everyday occurrence in Norfolk County, but when they do happen, they draw considerable attention, especially from our farming community," said Andrew Gamble of Norfolk OPP. "Since July, we've noticed an increase in thefts involving dirt bikes, ATVs, and trailers—both utility and camping. Generally, ve-

hicle thefts are more common in our rural areas, which naturally include farm properties."

He said the frequency of these thefts fluctuates through the year.

"Whether there are several incidents or few, even one is too many," he added.

Gamble shared the following steps to help reduce the risk of theft:

- Install GPS tracking/telemetry on high-value equipment; enable geofencing/alerts where available.
- Remove keys and use secondary immobilizers; don't leave equipment idling or unattended.
- Lock barns/sheds and gate yards; use sturdy chains and tamper-resistant locks.
- Record and mark serial numbers/VINs; photograph equipment and note unique identifiers.
- Improve lighting and sightlines; trim cover and consider motion-activated lights.
- Use surveillance cameras (cover entrances, fuel tanks, and equipment yards); post signage.
- Store attachments and fuel securely; don't leave tools that could aid a theft.
- Build a "watch network" with neighbours and staff; report suspicious activity promptly to the OPP at 1-888-310-1122 (or 9-1-1 in progress).
- If a theft occurs, report immediately so officers can act quickly. 



Police are asking for anyone seeing a Shandong Daou loader to report it after a theft from a Delhi-area farm.

# 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



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# Province investing \$1.7M to support Ontario beekeepers

*More than 200 businesses will receive money to help protect colonies*



Government funding of \$1.7 million will support 206 Ontario beekeeper businesses and fund a total of 334 projects.

#### **By Norfolk Farms Staff**

They do far more than just provide a delicious topping for toast, and last month Ontario's bee population got a little help from the provincial and federal governments.

A cash injection through the Honey Bee Health Initiative will support 206 local beekeeper businesses and 334 total projects. All told the two levels of government will contribute more than \$1.7 million to the project that's administered by the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association.

"Honey bees in Ontario provide valuable pollination services to many of the crops we eat. High winter losses, new pests, and the threat of treatment resistance have made recent years challenging for Ontario's beekeepers," said Ontario Beekeepers' Association president Stephen Moore in a press release.

"The Honey Bee Health Initiative has been a valuable support for beekeepers who are having to

change their practices or invest in new equipment to meet the emerging challenges. It is helping to enable beekeepers to continue to provide the critical pollination services to the broader agricultural and horticultural community here in Ontario."

The Healthy Bee Initiative provides cost-sharing opportunities for beekeepers to invest in projects that reduce overwintering losses, purchase equipment to improve hive health management and acquire new honey bee stock or queens.

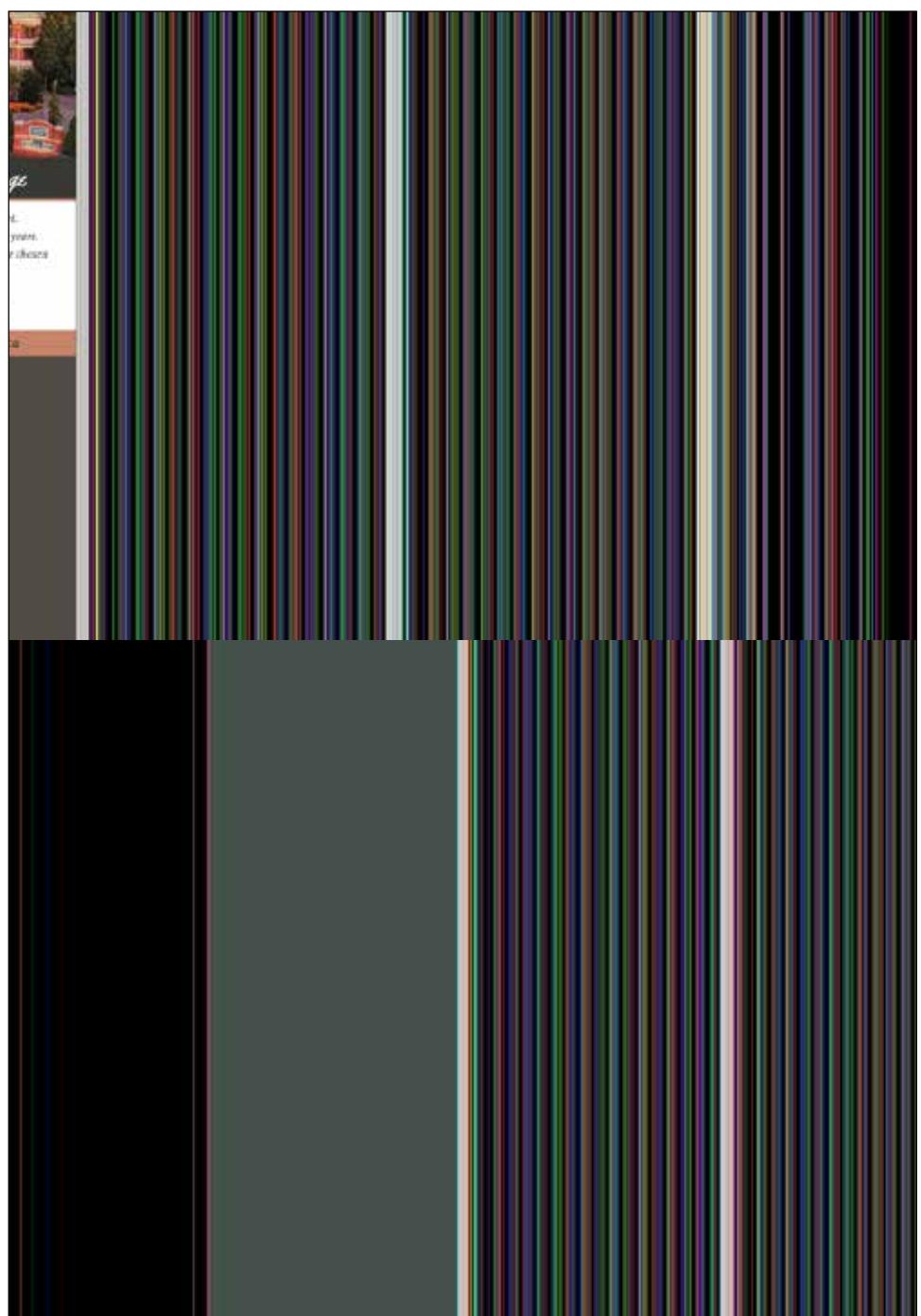
Funding comes through the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership.

"This strategic investment supports innovation and strengthens resilience across Ontario's agriculture and agri-food sectors, helping our farmers and food businesses navigate today's economic challenges. By supporting our beekeeping industry, we're protecting the essential role pollinators play in agriculture and securing Ontario's

food supply chains," said Trevor Jones, Ontario's minister of agriculture, food and agribusiness.

There were more than 4,000 registered beekeepers in Ontario

last year, generating \$28 million in farm gate sales. Bees, and pollinators like them, play a vital role in the food system, with many crops reliant on them to grow. 🐝



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# Phragmites is Canada's most invasive plant

By Alice Guthrie

Phragmites australis, also known as the European Common Reed, are tall perennial grasses with fluffy flower heads – quite pretty to look at, but that is the only good thing we can say for them.

These are invasive plants that are establishing large stands in wetlands and beaches in Southwestern Ontario, and across eastern North America. Phragmites is an aggressive plant, spreading rapidly and releasing toxins at the root level which interfere with and compete with native plants, hindering growth and killing them. It prefers standing water, but has a long root system which allows it to survive in drier areas. It has been considered Canada's worst invasive plant since 2005.

The plant has been in Ontario for decades. It is unknown how it was transported here from its original home in Eurasia.

Decreased biodiversity, increased fire risks from stands that contain a high percentage of dead stalks, issues with road safety due to blocked vision, and impacted recreational activities (swimming, boating, angling) are some of the detrimental effects these plants have.

The plants are huge, - growing fast to a height of up to five metres (15 feet) and forming dense stands – up to 200 stalks per square metre. Stems are tan or beige in colour; leaves are blue-green, seedheads are large and dense. It does not provide good habitat or food sources for wildlife.

It is easy to confuse these invasive phragmites with a closely related native species. The



Close-up of a phragmite seed head.

native version does not grow as tall and will co-exist with other native species. It does not form as dense a stand and is usually mixed with other plants. The colour is different – generally a reddish brown stalk with yellow-green leaves and a smaller seed head.

Invasive phragmites is restricted in Ontario, as the province attempts to prevent the further spread of the invader. Check more info and regulations on: [www.ontario.ca/invasionON](http://www.ontario.ca/invasionON). It is illegal to buy, sell, trade or grow these plants.

Control of these plants is coordinated among several groups. One province wide initiative is: <https://www.greenshovels.ca/invasive-phragmites-control-fund/>

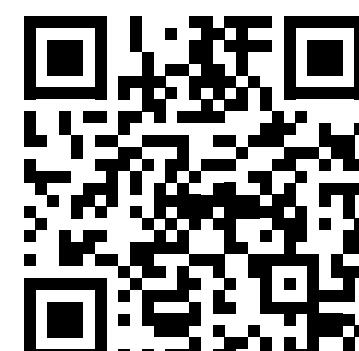
"Green Shovels is a collaborative of like-minded conservation organizations, and a collection of projects designed to achieve job creation,

economic recovery, and environmental progress while addressing invasive species issues," the web site states. This coalition includes Ducks Unlimited Canada, Federation of Ontario Cottagers Associations, Invasive Species Centre, The Nature Conservancy of Canada, Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, and the Ontario Invasive Plant Council.

Long Point has been a primary battleground against these invaders as they have been identified as a major threat to biodiversity in the area. A multi-partner alliance, including the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC), The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF), and Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) in partnership with the Long Point Phragmites Action Alliance (LPPAA), has



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# Phragmites is Canada's most invasive plant

worked since 2015 to address the impacts of phragmites and protect the region's important wetlands, considered globally significant. For more information check out this website: <https://longpointphragmites.ca/phragmites/> The group's success rate has been excellent, and most of the high density phragmite stands have been eliminated.

Another resource is The Invasive Phragmite Control Centre [www.phragcontrol.com](http://www.phragcontrol.com). Nicole Leversidge explained that methods of control include cutting to drown ... if the water is deep enough, the plant can be cut and the root system drowned. Success depends on the depth (60-80 cm of water is needed) and on the clarity of the water - murky is best, as sunlight is less able to penetrate, and there is more sediment. There is also a herbicide that can be used in wet areas.

On dry land, a terrestrial herbicide is sprayed on mature plants so the herbicide is carried to the roots with the goal to kill the root system ... this gives 85-98 per cent mortality.

While in an area where phragmites grow, stay on trails and keep pets leashed. When leaving, remove mud, seeds or plant parts from clothing, vehicles (including bicycles or ATVs), pets, horses and mowers to avoid accidentally spreading it through its root fragments and seeds. Composting these plants at home is also discouraged, as both seeds and rhizomes can survive home composter temperatures. Report locations of phragmites to Invading Species Hotline at 1-800-563-7711, or visit EDDMapS to report a sighting.

A final note: Burning phragmites is a bad idea - it burns fast and hot and large stands can ignite into large fires. People have lost houses from this idea. 



Phragmites highlighted against the background growth at pond edge.



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# Partnership aims to promote safety at agritourism workplaces



While farms can be wonderful, fun and beautiful places to visit, they can also pose dangers. WSPS and Agritourism Ontario are working together to keep agritourism locations as safe as possible.

#### **By Norfolk Farms Staff**

They can be among the most picturesque and beautiful places to visit, but many agritourism locations are still working farms that pose potential dangers.

A new partnership between Agritourism Ontario and Workplace Safety and Prevention Services seeks to promote safety within the agritourism sector. The collaboration was announced last month in a press release from Agritourism Ontario.

"The agritourism industry blends hospitality with agriculture, creating unique safety considerations for both workers and visitors," said Agritourism Ontario CEO Kevin Vallier. "By working with WSPS, we're equipping our members with the tools and knowledge they

need to create safer experiences for everyone on the farm."

A non-profit organization that's focused on protecting Ontario's workers and businesses, WSPS serves more than 174,000 member firms and 4.2 million workers across a mix of sectors including agriculture, manufacturing and service.

"We commend Agritourism Ontario for their leadership and dedication to safety," said WSPS President and CEO Jody Young. "As WSPS serves both the agriculture and services sectors, we are uniquely positioned to provide our expertise and support. This partnership allows us to engage directly with agritourism operators and help them to create

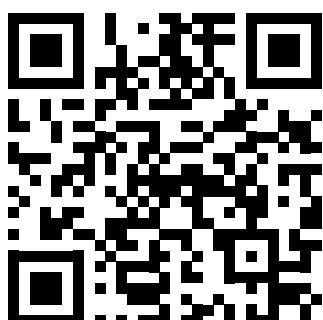
safer environments for their staff, guests, and larger communities."

The collaboration will see the two organizations work together to share information and content on how to make agritourism workplaces safer, educate employers and employees, and plan events and resource distribution opportunities.

Agritourism Ontario is a part of Ontario's nearly \$51 billion agri-food sector and represents a diverse network of farm-based agritourism businesses across the province, advocating for the growth and sustainability of the sector. The organization supports members through education, marketing, and policy development to ensure a vibrant and safe agritourism industry. ↗

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# OFA elections see Larry Davis returned as director

By Norfolk Farms Staff

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) welcomes two new and one returning director to its board table following elections in three of its zones.

Larry Davis of Burford was re-elected as the provincial director for Zone 3, representing farmers in Brant, Halidmand and Norfolk. Davis, an OFA director since 1989, farms with his wife and son, growing crops and raising sheep. Davis ran against chicken and beef farmer Henry Lise and beef and crop farmer Steve Sickle.

Maaike Campbell joins the board as the new director for Zone 6, representing farmers in Lambton and Middlesex counties. Together with her family, she farms near Strathroy, producing chicken and beef and growing crops. Campbell replaces Crispin Colvin, a beef and crop farmer who had represented Zone 6 on the board since 2016.

Marnie Wood has won the election to represent Zone 10 – Durham, Peterborough and Kawartha Lakes/Haliburton – on the OFA board. A second generation dairy farmer in Cannington, she fills the seat formerly held by Steve Brackenridge, who stepped down after nine years on the board. Wood ran against Matthew Porter, a beef and crop farmer and university researcher from Millbrook.

"We congratulate all successful candidates and look forward to working with them as part of our OFA board team," said OFA President



Drew Spoelstra. "We also appreciate and thank all members who let their name stand for a board position and participated in our election process. The strength of our organization comes from the commitment and passion of the farmers who step forward to take on these leadership roles, and it was great to see such a healthy interest in board positions this year."

Greg Dietrich of Mildmay was acclaimed as Zone 2 director representing Bruce and Grey counties, and Spoelstra, who farms near Binbrook growing crops, raising horses and producing beef and milk, was acclaimed as the Zone 5 representative for farmers in Halton, Hamilton/Wentworth and Niagara.

All new directors will officially begin their new roles on the OFA board following the OFA

annual general meeting, which will take place November 25 – 26 in Toronto.

Nominations for one of the OFA's two Director-at-Large positions will be accepted October 15 – 27, 2025. The election for this position will be held at the AGM.

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) represents 38,000 farm families across the province and serves as the leading advocate and strongest voice of Ontario's farmers. As a dynamic farmer-led organization, the OFA represents and champions the interests of Ontario farmers through government relations, farm policy recommendations, research, lobby efforts, community representation, media relations and more. 

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## Victory during the Second World War with Norfolk's Farmerettes



Farmerette Barracks at the Waterford High School in 1942.

Documenting and telling the story of our collective history - our community - remains at the heart of what we do in the museum world. We preserve, research, and share stories that have shaped the path forward. Often these narratives, though seemingly small in scope, prove to be immensely significant with far-reaching impacts. At the Waterford Heritage & Agricultural Museum there are many such examples – one of which recently garnered national attention through the release of the acclaimed documentary, *We Lend a Hand*.

This documentary, built upon the research of long-time advocates Bonnie Sitter and the late Shirley English, highlights the crucial, yet largely overlooked, role of Farmerettes during and immediately after World War Two. As men enlisted for overseas service, Canada faced a critical labour shortage that threatened vital food production—a challenge mirrored by industrial demands at factories like nearby Cockshutt and Massey. In response, an indispensable force emerged to “Lend a Hand”: tens of thousands of young women from across the province answered the call, joining the Ontario Farm Service Force (OFSF). These women, affectionately known as Farmerettes, became a crucial support system for the agricultural sector. By 1942, Norfolk County had its own OFSF camp, with barracks established at the Waterford High School - continuing operations through each harvest season until 1946.

Personal accounts from this period offer a vivid glimpse into their experiences. In a letter dated July 16, 1942, Joyce O'Neill recounted working in the strawberry fields, noting that

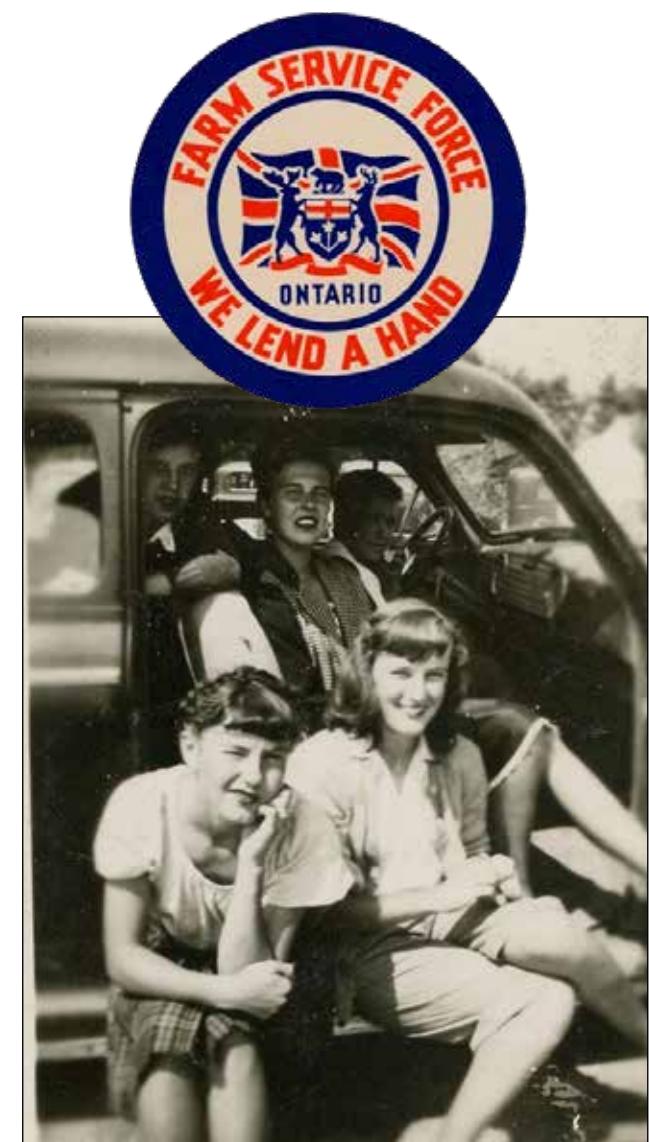
some of her fellow Farmerettes were “glad to be able to straighten their knees and lift their heads again” when the crop was finally done. More adventurous members, however, happily scaled cherry tree ladders. Joyce herself expressed great enthusiasm for being taught to drive a tractor and managing a team of horses to cultivate tomatoes. For the vast majority of these women, many leaving the city for the first time, rural life and farm work were entirely new. Despite the challenges, Joyce remained enthusiastic, appreciative of the hospitality shown by Waterford residents, particularly Mr. D’Hondt of the Royal Theatre for allowing admittance to shows at matinee prices.

Homesickness and exhaustion quickly gave way to an overwhelming sense of duty. The Force’s official motto, “We Lend A Hand,” was famously reinterpreted by Norfolk’s Farmerettes to: “we would rather work than sleep for victory!” Their efforts were no less critical than those building aircraft at Cockshutt or tending to the wounded; these women brought in the harvest that fed Canadian and allied forces. When a farmer was asked how he would have managed without them, his response was unequivocal: it simply couldn’t have been done. The story of the Farmerettes, now in print and on the big screen, stands as a testament to the immense power of collective action and the enduring legacy of these young women who volunteered to help win victory.

For details on *We Lend A Hand: The Forgotten Story of Ontario Farmerettes*, visit [www.welendahand.ca](http://www.welendahand.ca)



Waterford's Annie Zaluski (nee Steel) with fellow Farmerettes.



Ron Anderson driving off-duty Farmettes Joan Henry, Sybil Black and Barb Otty to a picnic at the St. Williams Forestry Station in 1946

# Horse Tales

BY LISA WRIGHT



## The immortal Town Pro inducted into hall of fame

Immortal – “having perpetual life, exempt from oblivion”

In mid-April of 1987 a big, dark bay filly was born on the Webster farm between Paris and St George. Her dam, Programmed, was a Canadian Champion who had once shared the world record for pacing fillies. The filly's sire, Big Towner, was a top stallion at the famous Hanover Shoe Farms in Pennsylvania. Breeders Brian Webster of St George and Ray Bednarz of Brantford had high hopes for their long-legged filly. Brian was from a well-known and successful local family of Standardbred breeders and trainers. As a Standardbred driver, Brian had an incredible record. Although he didn't race a lot, in 201 lifetime starts Brian had 172 wins. That's a win percentage of almost 86 per cent, impressive considering the all-time leading drivers in the sport average 15-20 per cent wins to starts.

For well over a year, the filly grew and played in the fields of Brant County.

In the fall of 1988, the filly, now a substantial yearling officially named Town Pro, was consigned to the Canadian Select yearling sale and bought for \$60,000 by a Toronto-based partnership including her dam Programmed's former trainer and driver, Stew Firlotte and Doug Brown.

Life for the filly changed. She soon started into training, first learning how to go in harness then hitched to a jog-cart. She gradually became accustomed to the activities and routine of track life. Like many talented individuals, she was not easy to manage. Grooms, trainer Stew Firlotte and driver Doug Brown handled her with respect, if not outright caution. Once on the track, she was all business. Town Pro spent months learning the ropes of racing, growing stronger and more confident before starting her career with a win in June '89 in Elmira. She went on to win 12 of 13 starts that year, including the prestigious Pennsylvania Sires Stakes and the Breeders Crown in record time. The filly from St George was voted the O'Brien Award (Canada) and Dan Patch Award (US) for 2-year-old pacing filly of the year!

By three, the filly had matured into a powerhouse. She had 17 starts that year, winning 14 times and was never worse than third. In August, she broke the world record for female pacers of any age! Numerous stakes wins, another world record record time in the Fan Hanover Stakes and a first-ever by any horse back-to-back Breeders Crown victory resulted in two more O'Brien and Dan Patch pacing filly titles in a row and Canadian Horse of the Year. Town Pro was the first filly ever to win both two-year-old and three-year-old Dan Patch and O'Brien awards.

Town Pro raced lightly for a couple more years, retiring with 40 wins and earnings over \$1.22 million. This was long before the



million dollar purses of today, but would equate to roughly \$3 million in today's dollars.

In 2004, Town Pro was inducted into the Canadian Racing Hall of Fame.

But that's not immortality.

As a broodmare, Town Pro produced 18 foals (Standardbreds allow embryo transfer), surviving life-threatening torsion colic surgery three times, two of these while successfully carrying foals to term. Out of 13 starters, 10 were winners with total earnings over \$4 million! Her daughter Darlin's Delight earned \$2.9 million and produced a million dollar winning daughter, Darlinonthebeach. Town Pro passed

away peacefully in October of 2014 in her stall at White Birch Farm in NJ, which had been her home for 20 years.

Two world records, numerous International titles and a legacy of winners: say the name Town Pro to anyone even remotely involved in Standardbred racing and they light up, remembering watching the powerful mare winning race after race, or knowing her as the dam of Champions.

That's immortality.

Congratulations to the filly from St George, Town Pro, inducted this year as an “Immortal” into the Harness Racing Hall of Fame. 🍀

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## The year of the Great Pumpkin returns



2020 was a record year in a lot of ways, but one great thing that came out of that tumultuous year was a record crop of pumpkin production in Canada (over 96 000 tonnes!).

Not only did the market pumpkin production boom, but many discovered the benefits of a home-grown pumpkin patch (easily done when they produce between 300-500 seeds per fruit.)

Now, five years later, Canadians are 'rolling' in pumpkins! At between \$5-7 dollars per can, 'tis the season to save by purchasing your own farm fresh pumpkins, cook them up, and freeze batches of the flesh to use in recipes all throughout the year!

Here at the Moose Lodge, Moose himself enjoys a feast of pumpkin, which not only provides humans with a punch of vitamins, minerals and fibre, but is also good for a dog's digestive system. Whether feeding straight up cooked pumpkin to your K-9, or looking to add to a Thanksgiving feast of the humanoid variety, pumpkins are sure to provide that homely-goodness of fall!

### Start The Morning Right Pumpkin Pancakes

1-1/4 cups whole wheat flour  
3 t. brown sugar  
2 t. baking powder  
1/4 t. salt  
1 t. cinnamon  
1/4 t. Nutmeg, ginger, and cloves

1 cup milk  
1/2 cup pureed pumpkin  
2 eggs  
Oil or butter for pan/griddle  
You know what to do from here! Mix dry and wet ingredients and then blend together. Pour out into a griddle/fry pan and flip when fragrant. Serve with fresh whipped cream, apple pie filling, Canadian maple syrup, or all of the above!

### Boom! Pumpkin Soup

One of our favourite African restaurants serves a soup that has flavours that far surpass any pumpkin soup we have ever had. After some research and tinkering, here's our family's version!

In a crock pot, add:

2 cups pumpkin, cooked and pureed  
1 can of coconut milk  
1 cup of milk (or refrigerated coconut milk)  
2 t. white sugar (more to taste)  
4 t. butter (unsalted if you are salt sensitive)  
1 t. cinnamon  
1 t. coriander  
1 t. ginger  
1/2 t. nutmeg

Stir. Cook on high for 1-2 hours, or low 4 hours.

Then add 1-2 cups white cheese, shredded. Stir until melted. Taste and see if you would like it a little sweeter and saltier.

Serve with a nice naan bread for dipping and a fresh, zesty salad.

### Beery Pumpkin Chilli

Try this healthy alternative to traditional chilli. If feeling brave, you could add a few tablespoons of peanut butter. Add the following to a pot and heat through:

1 package of ground beef, fried with 1 chopped bell pepper

1 can pumpkin puree (or two cups of your own puree)

1 can tomato paste  
1 can crushed tomatoes  
1 can alcohol free beer  
2 t. cumin  
1 t. cinnamon  
4 t. chilli powder  
1 t. each garlic and onion powder

### Wifesaver Quick Pumpkin Cake/Muffins

1 box of cake mix (yellow or chocolate work best)

1 cup pumpkin puree  
1/4 cup water if using canned puree  
2 t. oil  
3 eggs  
3/4 cup yogurt

Mix and bake at 350°F for about 20 minutes, or until fork prick comes out mostly clean.

Optional: For chocolate cake, you could add chocolate chips or Nutella for an icing. For yellow cake, you could add a cream cheese icing mixed with pumpkin spice. 

# From the Field:

THE LATEST FROM NORFOLK SOIL AND CROP ASSOCIATION

## What can Norfolk Soil & Crop Improvement Association offer you?



Peter Johnson of Real Agriculture driving in the International Harvester at Norfolk's Compaction Day August 3, 2023



Kevin McKague of OMAFA explaining the soil horizons of Norfolk soils at Irrigation Day June 25, 2024

**By Nancy Van Sas**

Although Norfolk Soil & Crop Improvement Association (SCIA) has been around for many years, some of you may not know everything about what this grass-roots organization can offer you.

Norfolk SCIA is comprised of local farmers working with other local farmers to make improvements to their farm operations for soil health and water quality. Each county across Ontario has its own local association. Norfolk SCIA is unique in that its members come from a vast array of farming operations, including horticulture, oil seeds and grain, and a few livestock holders as well.

Research trials are at the root of Norfolk SCIA's mandate. Currently, Norfolk has three trials underway for the 2025 season, with the results to be presented at their 2026 March Grower Day.

- Dosimeter trail measuring the loss from fertilizer applications
- Sulphur trial in soybeans evaluating soybean response to applications of sulfur fertilizer
- A 3 different nitrogen rate trial with and without mushroom compost

Norfolk SCIA is always looking for ways to increase our knowledge base through our trials. If you have suggestions or are interested in participating in future trials, consider becoming a member and join in on our trial research.

Each year, some of our Norfolk SCIA members collect rainfall data during the growing season of April 1 to September 30. If you have the desire to find out these results or wish to contribute with data collection on your farm, Norfolk SCIA is always looking for participants to document precipitation across our entire county.

At the root of Norfolk SCIA's mission is to acquire knowledge from each other. One of these ways is to visit and learn from other farm

operations. Bus trips and twilight tour opportunities have been successful in the past. Plans are currently underway for a bus tour in 2026 offering an opportunity to discover the inner workings of other farm operations, ascertaining what worked and as equally important what did not work for them. Stay tuned for more details in the coming months.

Norfolk SCIA is always looking for suggestions for future events and opportunities to connect with fellow farm operations. Please reach out if you wish to provide a learning opportunity or suggestions on future events that highlight the journey behind the operation.

Previous large-scale events included the Compaction Day in 2023 on the home farm of Jeff Purdy in Courtland. This three-day undertaking included weighing various pieces of equipment and then running those same pieces of equipment over sensors at 6", 12" and 20" to document the amount of pressure applied on the ground. The Compaction Day results from the study can be found on Field Crop News ([www.fieldcropnews.com](http://www.fieldcropnews.com)).

In 2024, NSCIA hosted Irrigation Day in Port Burwell. This event featured various types of irrigation equipment currently available for producers, as well as an in-depth view of how water flows within our Norfolk Soils.

Norfolk SCIA promotes the future of agriculture within the county by offering a bursary program for students entering into post-secondary education linked to agriculture. Applications are available each spring through the guidance departments at all high schools throughout the county or by contacting Norfolk SCIA directly. We welcome all application submissions.

Norfolk SCIA is one of several local associations that also include Brant, Hamilton/Wentworth, Haldimand, Niagara, Halton and Peel to create the region of Golden Horseshoe. Collectively, this region works with the adjoining

region of Heartland (Peel, Huron, Waterloo and Wellington SCIA's) to offer the Midwest Agricultural Conference. This year's conference will be held on January 16, 2026. Program details will be released shortly with registration opening early November.

The association is only one-third of what OSCIA has to offer. The program branch delivers cost-share and learning opportunities including the fifth edition of the Environmental Farm Plan and commodity-specific Biosecurity workshops to producers. To learn more about funding or educational opportunities, please visit [www.ontariosoilcrop.org](http://www.ontariosoilcrop.org).

The newly-formed research division of OSCIA provides other opportunities for producers to become involved in research trials. OSCIA is one of 14 locations across Canada that are part of the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Agricultural Climate Solutions – Living Labs program. This five-year initiative brings together farmers, researchers, experts and organizations to co-develop, test, and evaluate best management practices (BMPs) that address climate change in both cropping and livestock systems.

The research division is also part of the On-Farm Applied Research and Monitoring (ONFARM) program, a nine-year initiative that supports water quality and soil health on farms across Ontario. Currently, there are 23 sites across Ontario evaluating new soil health indicators and testing BMPs through paired plot trials. For water quality, there are ongoing studies of the impacts of BMPs on water quality and in-field soil water dynamics.

There are a number of ways for you to become involved with SCIA either locally, regionally or provincially. If you wish to find out more information on any of these initiatives, please contact Nancy Van Sas at [nvansas@ontariosoilcrop.org](mailto:nvansas@ontariosoilcrop.org) or call 226-583-0850. 



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2021 Fendt 1038, 1260 hours, 380 Engine HP \$520,000



2023 Fendt 824, 607 hours, 240 Engine HP....\$365,000



2022 Fendt 822, 1744 Hours, 220 Engine HP, Deluxe Cab....\$329,000



2014 Fendt 724 Vario 7,958 Hours, 237HP 6.06l \$145,000



2022 Fendt 714, 1,418 hours, 140 HP Deutz 6.1L, 50KM CVT Vario....\$249,500



1995 Massey Ferguson, 6,160 hours, 160 PTO HP \$49,750



2016 Massey Ferguson 7716, 4,598 hours, 150HP Agco Power....\$114,000



2005 Massey Ferguson 5465, 4,840 Hours, 120 Engine HP, \$41,500



2021 Massey Ferguson GC1725 160 hours, 4WD Front Axle \$23,500



2013 Challenger MT535D 4,482 hours, 150 HP \$114,000



2022 Case IH Magnum 380 Row trac, 689 hours, 315 PTO HP....\$449,000



2013 New Holland T6.140 1,200 hours, 90 PTO HP, 140 Engine HP....\$69,000



2015 Ventrac 4500Y Tractor, 1,365 hours, 25HP Kubota Diesel Engine....\$22,900



2005 Ventrac 4100 Tractor with 2,143 hours. Powered by a 31 HP....\$6,750



2009 Ventrac 3200 Tractor. 23.6 HP Briggs & Stratton diesel engine....\$4,500



2024 Fendt Sprayer, 365hp, 53 km Road speed, 76" clearance, 120ft boom....\$835,000



2019 Gleaner s96, AGCO power 8.4L Engine, 4 speed hydrostatic, 34km....\$320,00



2023 Manitou MLT841 2,397HRS, 141hp Yanmar, 5 speed shift trans....\$149,900



2022 Manitou MLT841 Telehandler with 1,305 hours. Powered by a 145 HP Yanmar engine....\$159,900



2018 Manitou MLT737-130PS, 129 hp Deutz, 6FD/3RV, 8,100 lb lift capacity....\$132,500



2018 Manitou MLT737, 2,700 hours. Powered by a 129 HP Deutz turbo engine \$105,000



2018 Manitou MLT630, 1550 Hours, Deutz Engine, Heat and AC, Air Seat, 2 Speed \$118,900



2017 Manitou MLT625 Telehandler with 1,650 hours. Powered by a 74 HP Kubota engine....\$97,500



2023 Manitou MT625, 74HP, 2F/2R, 4WD, cab steer modes, 5,500 lb lift capacity....\$102,000



2007 Gehl CT7-23 Telehandler with 4,275 hours, Powered by a 101 HP Perkins engine....\$45,000



2022 Merlo TF33.7, 2,384 hours. Powered by a 115 HP Deutz engine.... \$74,900



1995 John Deere 8200 6,210 hours, 180 PTO HP, 7.6l John Deere engine....\$109,900



2007 John Deere 7330 6,451 hours, John Deere 6.8l 6 cylinder....\$90,000



2013 New Holland T6.140 1,200 hours, and comes equipped with a 140 max engine....\$69,000



2022 Case IH Magnum 380 AFS, 689 hours, 380 engine HP....\$449,000



2022 Sunflower 6631-24 Vertical Tillage tool, 24ft working width, 1 year full warranty....\$112,000



2007 John Deere 2310 Mulch finisher, 40ft, 7.5" blade spacing....\$39,500



2012 Kongskilde 300 Plow, 5 furrow plow, Hydraulic Adjust & Reset....\$4,500



2023 Tubeline Bale boss, This unit was used only as a demo and is in like-new condition....\$14,900



2018 Kuhn FC4060TCS Mower, 13 ft cutting width with 2-point center pivot hitch for excellent maneuverability....\$36,000