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**"This bill represents a major shift in policy that will impact patient care and extinguish our voice in the running of the health-care and social-service institutions that our community has built and maintained for generations."**

— Quebec Community Groups Network president Eva Ludvig, commenting on Bill 15, which aims to restructure Quebec's health care sector

## QFA VIDEOCONFERENCES

**Wed., January 24, 2024**  
at 7:30 p.m.

**Claim Your Space:  
The Farmer's Survival  
Guide for Women**

See page 12 for details.



MCGILL UNIVERSITY

The number of students at Macdonald Campus in Ste. Anne de Bellevue is expected to drop if measures outlined by the provincial government to dramatically raise tuition for students from out of province attending an English-language university are implemented.

## Concern raised over future of Mac Farm

Quebec's plan to hike tuition at McGill will affect Agriculture faculty: Vice-Chancellor

**Brenda O'Farrell**  
*The Advocate*

Serious questions are being raised about the future of the farm at Macdonald Campus of McGill University in the wake of the provincial government's plan to dramatically hike tuition for students from outside Quebec looking to attend English-language universities.

In an open letter Nov. 2, Deep Saini, the principal and vice-chancellor of McGill, singled out a short list of faculties and programs that could face the biggest impacts if the tuition increases are imposed for 2024, levelling a serious financial blow to the university. The letter has sent waves of concern about the long-term prospects of the operations at the university's campus in Ste. Anne de Bellevue.

"The Faculty of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, the Faculty of Education and the B.A. & Sc. Interfaculty programs will also be

severely affected," wrote Saini, outlining the hit McGill would suffer from the provincial government's decision.

The Agricultural and Environmental Sciences faculty has about 2,000 students, according to Valerie Orsat, assistant dean of student affairs for the department. That includes roughly 1,300 undergraduates and 700 graduate students. In the last five years, about 20 per cent of them come from other provinces.

Another 20 to 25 per cent are foreign students. With Quebec also proposing changes in the funding model for international students, this could further reduce the revenue McGill retains from the tuition paid by these students.

"We can't offer programs if we don't have students," Orsat said.

The immediate question looming over the faculty, Orsat said, was the university's current student recruitment campaign, which is in full swing in November.

See **MAC FARM**, Page 4

## Ag insurance programs can't keep up with inflation, extreme weather

**Andrew McClelland**  
*The Advocate*

Quebec Liberal agriculture critic André Fortin is calling for the provincial government to completely revise its farm support programs in the wake of inflation and adverse weather due to climate change.

"The reality of today's farmers has changed a lot," said Fortin, who also serves as the MNA for Pontiac. "Climate change, the meteoric rise in production costs and inflation are making their lives extremely complicated and too often leading them to consider abandoning production."

The 2023 growing season has certainly been a trying one for Quebec's agricultural producers, with extreme weather events and high amounts of rainfall making production unpredictable, particularly for market gardeners. Those factors are creating financial havoc for farmers, and Fortin says many of his constituents are saying the existing insurance programs offered by La Financière agricole du Québec no longer address their needs.

"We need to review our agricultural insurance programs," wrote Fortin in a post on his official Facebook page on Nov. 2. "They are old, clunky, hard to navigate and are most certainly not adapted to the reality of farming in 2023. We have to protect our farms better."

La Financière could probably attest to that fact itself. For the 2022-23 fiscal year, it paid out a whopping \$287.1 million in support to stabilize the income of agricultural producers. That's more than double compared with the 2021-22 fiscal year's total of \$119.6 million, and substantially above the \$198.9 million paid out in 2020-21.

See **LA FINANCIÈRE**, Page 4



# Just the facts

## 10%+

Crops and livestock production currently generate just over 10% of Canada's greenhouse gas emissions.

Source: *A New Ag Deal: A 9-Point Plan For Climate-Smart Agriculture* and produced by the Royal Bank of Canada, the BCG Centre for Canada's Future and the Arrell Food Institute at the University of Guelph

## 5.8%

The percentage increase in the number of unfilled jobs in Quebec from 2021 to 2022. The regions with the highest uptick in the number of job vacancies were Capitale-Nationale (7%), the Laurentians (6.5%) and the Montérégie (6%).

Source: *L'Institut de la statistique du Québec's Panorama des régions du Québec* published on Nov. 1, 2023

## 31%

This is the amount of potash Canada supplies to the world, making it the largest producer of this potassium-rich fertilizer. But the country is still reliant on other nations for nitrogen and phosphorus.

Source: *A New Ag Deal: A 9-Point Plan For Climate-Smart Agriculture* and produced by the Royal Bank of Canada, the BCG Centre for Canada's Future and the Arrell Food Institute at the University of Guelph

## \$105,110

The highest median after-tax income for a two-adult household in the Nord-du-Québec region in 2020, which represents the highest of all 17 administrative regions of the province.

The lowest median after-tax income for a two-adult household was \$76,970 in Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

Source: *L'Institut de la statistique du Québec's Panorama des régions du Québec* published on Nov. 1, 2023

## FALL HARVEST



IAN GRANT, THE ADVOCATE

In rural areas, the last few days of October are filled with scenes of taking home the harvest, like this producer in Très St. Redempteur, near the Ontario border in the Montérégie.



### Mission

To defend the rights, provide information and advocate for the English-speaking agricultural community in Quebec.

### Vision

The QFA's actions contribute to a sustainable future for both agriculture and the environment while providing a decent quality of life and financial return for the individuals and their families who have made agriculture and food production their chosen professions.

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# Average value of farmland sold in Quebec in 2022 up slightly

**Brenda O'Farrell**  
*The Advocate*

The average value of farmland sold in Quebec edged upward slightly in 2022, according to the latest figures in a new analysis issued by La Financière Agricole du Québec earlier this month.

The average value of a hectare of agriculturally zoned land sold last year was \$16,695, just \$68 more than the average price of \$16,627 registered in 2021, according to the Transac-TERRES 2023 report released Nov. 13.

The value of agricultural zoned land in cultivation, however, dropped in the last year, the report states. Although the prices for this category of land is comparatively higher, the average selling price in 2022 dropped compared with the previous year. The average price of a hectare of cultivated farmland sold in 2022 was \$27,419 – or \$1,126 less than the \$28,545 average recorded in 2021.

The report was compiled based on all sales of agricultural land in the province recorded on official land registries from 2019 to 2022.

Among other findings in the report was the wide range of land values seen in farmland from one region of the province to the other. These figures varied from a low of \$1,100 per hectare in Abitibi-Témiscamingue to a high of \$42,000 per hectare in the western end of the Montérégie region.

The majority of sales – 71 per cent – were concentrated in five regions – Chaudière-Appalaches, Montérégie, Estrie, the Bas-Saint-Laurent and the Centre du Québec.

La Financière stressed that a number of factors influence the price of farmland, including demand for land in a certain area, conditions of a particular sale and the quality of the soil.

**Average annual value of farmland sold in Quebec**

Year	Value (\$/ha)	Variation (%)	Number of transactions
2019	14 580	-	1 137
2020	14 166	-2,8	1 148
2021	16 627	17,4	876
2022	16 695	0,14	1 006

**Average value of farmland by region**

Region	Average 2022 (\$/ha)	Average 2021 (\$/ha)	Variation 2021-22 (%)	Variation from max to min (\$/ha)	Deviation 2022 (\$/ha)
Abitibi-Témiscamingue	1 125	2 022	-44	570 – 2 500	537
Bas-Saint-Laurent	4 201	3 113	35	850 – 15 800	3 482
Capitale-Nationale	11 288	11 496	-2	2 660 – 28 700	6 598
Centre-du-Québec	16 292	14 960	9	2 470 – 37 900	9 358
Chaudière-Appalaches Nord	9 484	9 985	-5	1 490 – 28 500	6 805
Chaudière-Appalaches Sud	9 072	9 340	-3	2 310 – 27 400	5 944
Estrie	13 751	15 186	-9	2 320 – 69 300	12 806
Lanaudière	33 310	29 604	13	2 500 – 62 300	14 695
Laurentides	29 107	27 304	7	1 660 – 71 100	17 250
Mauricie	14 718	11 486	28	1 020 – 40 400	11 504
Montérégie Est	37 041	34 606	7	3 400 – 71 900	16 300
Montérégie Ouest	41 843	32 260	30	9 100 – 73 800	14 763
Outaouais	6 702	5 365	25	1 390 – 22 700	5 703
Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean	6 589	5 416	22	1 090 – 20 200	4 891
Ensemble du Québec	16 695	16 627	0,4	570 – 73 800	s. o.

## Quebec approves move to allow UPA to change members' fee structure

**Brenda O'Farrell**  
*The Advocate*

The Union des producteurs agricoles welcomed the news earlier this month that the Quebec National Assembly voted to approve Bill 28, which allows the farmers' union to change its fees charged to agricultural producers.

"Premier François Legault and his government honoured their electoral promise by adopting legislative changes to adjust our funding formula to reflect today's reality in the agricultural

sector," said UPA president Martin Caron.

The bill, which passed the last legislative hurdle Nov. 9, will now allow the UPA to review its financing structure and begin consultations with producers with the aim of adopting a new fee structure. This new structure would then have to be submitted to the Régie des Marchés Agricole et Alimentaires du Québec for approval. The Régie is an administrative tribunal tasked with overseeing the marketing of agricultural and forestry products.

What this will mean for individual producers

is not yet clear. The UPA would only say the law will give it more flexibility, allowing it to fix mandatory fees charged to producers based on the legal status of the farming business, taking into account the number of owners and the size of the company.

"It will now be possible for us to count on a fairer formula, as producers have been demanding for several years," Caron said in a statement.

Bill 28 will affect all 42,000 agricultural producers represented by the UPA.

## News

### LA FINANCIÈRE: For some, it has been wettest summer ever

From Page 1

For producers like Rob MacWhirter from Gaspé, the extreme weather events of the summer of 2023 led to never-before-seen troubles.

"Our haying was really out of whack this year," MacWhirter said. "It rained intermittently and then there were rains like monsoons. It was just ridiculous. And there was so much damage to the fields."

MacWhirter's family beef operation cuts hay on about 300 acres in Hopetown, about 10 kilometres east of New Carlisle on the Gaspé coast. For him and his family, getting dry hay in the barn was nearly impossible.

"In all of July and August, we had two narrow windows of four days each where we had west wind and sun," he said. "And we were in such a rush to get the early hay in and wrap it that the quality is low. It didn't get dried down to where it should've been."

As a result, MacWhirter's operation found themselves doing their first cut of hay at the beginning of September, indicating a full month of waiting for dry weather.

"It's certainly the most rain we've had in a summer in my lifetime," he told *The Advocate*. "And my dad is 90 years old, and he said the same."

In response to reports like these from producers, Quebec Agriculture Minister André Lamontagne held a meeting with the Union des producteurs agricoles on Nov. 9 to hear what a special committee created in August by the Ministère de l'Agriculture, des



Pontiac MNA André Fortin speaking in the National Assembly on Nov. 2 about how Quebec's agricultural insurance programs no longer meet the needs of farmers. "Our agricultural insurance programs ... are old, clunky, and hard to navigate," Fortin said.

Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation du Québec (MAPAQ) could do to adapt to increased inflation and adverse weather.

La Financière had already made adjustments to the calculations and coverage offered by its Crop Insurance Program (known as ASREC) to provide emergency support to producers. But now, it says, an in-depth review of ASREC is being conducted to see how it can be changed to align with increasingly unpredictable weather, inflation and climate change. A completely revised version of the program is expected to launch some time in 2024-25.



FACEBOOK.COM

### MAC FARM: FMT already hit by drop in enrolment due to Bill 96

From Page 1

"It's recruiting season right now," she said. "Do we completely forget the rest of Canada?"

With tuition for students from outside Quebec set to jump from \$8,992 to approximately \$17,000, Orsat seriously questions how many students from the rest of Canada would opt for McGill.

Orsat says the faculty always attracts students from the western provinces, explaining they see McGill as an exciting option that offers them a "different experience before settling on the family farm."

Adding to the uncertainty is the blow that the campus's Farm Management and Technology program has already suffered this year with the changes it was forced to impose due to Bill 96, the province's update to its Charter of the French Language.

The FMT program is a CEGEP-level offering that has seen its numbers drop in the past year because it must now abide by new regulations requiring all students to have certificates of eligibility to attend an English-language institution. Post-secondary students from other provinces do not qualify for an eligibility certificate.

"My numbers are already down," said Pascal Theriault, head of the FMT program.

"I'm not sure what to think yet,"

Theriault added. "There is still a big fog around it," he added, referring to the uncertainty of what the future holds.

With the number of FMT students dropping and the number of students in the Faculty of Agriculture poised to take a dip due to the tuition hikes, the cost of maintaining the farm becomes more difficult, he said.

The capacity to continue to offer quality programs if the faculty loses a number of students in the undergrad level could be affected, he said, adding the FMT program would not be able to afford to keep the farm operating on its own. "We might lose a critical mass of students."

Theriault said offering proper training for students in the field of agriculture is expensive, but in the era of growing climate change challenges it is even more crucial.

"If you want to train farmers in new technologies, you need that infrastructure," he said.

Training agrologists and agricultural engineers is crucial now more than ever, Theriault said. "When I look at climate change, the financial stress, the need to have professionals working with (farmers) to feed Canadians – that is where my concern is," he added.

### UPA plans march in Quebec City in December

Brenda O'Farrell  
*The Advocate*

The Union des producteurs agricoles is planning a march next month in Quebec City, what the provincial farmers' union is calling a public demonstration of solidarity with the next generation of farmers.

"The time has come to put in place solutions to ensure the sustainability of agricultural businesses, the vitality of our regions as well as the food future of Quebecers," the UPA said in a statement.

The event at the provincial capital will be held Dec. 6, when the UPA will be hosting its annual Congrès Général.

"At the dawn of its 100th anniversary,

the UPA is calling on governments, partners and citizens to lay the foundation for an important project that would truly give Quebec the means to aim for greater food autonomy," the organization stated.

The march will start at the Quebec City Convention Centre and make its way to the National Assembly. Agricultural producers attending the UPAs Congrès Général and their families are invited to join the procession.

The aim is to impress upon provincial lawmakers of the urgency to support agricultural and forestry producers in this time of growing erratic weather conditions and harsh inflationary pressures.



UPA

Biodiversity initiatives – such as saving wetlands like this one in Lac Boivin near Granby – are at the heart of Quebec's Plan Nature 2023. But the UPA is hoping the plan will not be used as a way to re-zone agricultural land as conservation areas.

# Plan Nature 2030 could change the face of Quebec farming

**Andrew McClelland**  
*The Advocate*

The Union des producteurs agricoles has voiced its concerns about how the provincial government will implement its "Plan Nature 2030" – Quebec's far-reaching consultation and planning project that will determine how it will preserve biodiversity and protect 30 per cent of its terrestrial, marine and coastal ecosystems by the beginning of the next decade.

The producers' union wants to make sure that agricultural and forestry producers are involved in the development and implementation of that plan. And chief among its concerns are protecting the agricultural zone and ensuring that environmental regulations work in tandem with ag production.

"The protection of biodiversity through the conservation of 30 per cent of Quebec territory by 2030 – the Quebec government's Plan Nature 2030 – must not be done to the detriment of agricultural activities," said UPA president Martin Caron.

The UPA also wants there to be consistency between federal and provincial strategic plans that promote biodiversity and also between the different plans put in place by the

government of Quebec. That includes Quebec's Sustainable Agriculture Plan and Ottawa's Agricultural Climate Solutions Program.

## Farms already doing their part

The union listed its demands in a consultation document sent out to UPA members in October. Those included that "the publication of the Plan Nature 2030 be made once the government guidelines for agricultural protection have been established," while also noting that "practices beneficial for biodiversity are already in place on farms," such as the use of agricultural landscaping, windbreak hedges and cover crops.

The UPA is also concerned that the Plan Nature could lead to much agricultural land in the green zone being lost should it be re-zoned as conservation areas. That, says Caron, could lead to further sacrifices made by the agriculture industry in the name of sustainable ag development and biodiversity protection.

"The government of Quebec must clearly reaffirm that all agricultural areas are important and suitable for agricultural and forestry activities, regardless of their classification," said Caron, noting that since 1998, Quebec's agricultural zone has been losing the equivalent of

12 football fields of arable land per day due to areas being classified as "non-agricultural" territories for everything from the drainage of municipal lands and right-of-way usage.

## Zero net loss of farmland

"(Quebec) must also curb urban sprawl and the growing use of the 'non-agricultural usage' legislation, while introducing the principle of 'zero net loss' in green zones," Caron said, adding: "That is to say no new loss of agricultural or forestry area."

The UPA's demands include that there be "zero net loss" in the green zone, requesting instead that the implementation of the Plan Nature 2030 "respect the principle of zero net loss for the agricultural zone and defend the agricultural zone from conversion into a conservation zone."

The CAQ government announced the creation of the Plan Nature in December of last year, following the signing of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, adopted at the end of the 15th conference of Parties to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (aka, the COP-15), held in Montreal in 2022.

The plan has a budget of \$650 million to be used over seven years to protect

and restore biodiversity, encourage sustainable practices, act on factors of biodiversity loss and collaborate with Indigenous communities and civil society to conserve biodiversity.

That collaboration has recently taken the form of an extensive series of public meetings conducted throughout October and November by the Regroupement national des conseils régionaux de l'environnement du Québec (the National Network of Regional Environmental Councils of Quebec or RNCREQ).

## Financial support for farmers needed

UPA representatives have been following and participating in the consultations, citing that it wants new investments for research to find innovative solutions to increase agricultural productivity while improving environmental quality. It also asks for financial support for agricultural and forestry producers implementing practices beneficial to biodiversity, along with funds for technical support, training and awareness.

Described as the largest investment in the history of Quebec, the Plan Nature 2023 should be launched at the beginning of 2024.



JOHN MCCART

This group went on to become the Class of '83, graduates of Macdonald College's DIP program.



Forty years later, some of us got together to tour the campus and get reacquainted. It was a good time.



**John McCart**  
QFA President

Late August 1981. That was the start of my journey through the campus of Macdonald College of McGill University. Fresh off from finishing Grade 13 in Ontario, I was one of the young recruits in the Diploma in Agriculture program, which is now referred to as Farm Management and Technology.

Over the next two years, I took courses in farm management, economics, agronomy, beekeeping, engineering, biology, animal nutrition, soil health – and the list goes on. I learned a lot back then, but one of the most important lessons was to be open to new ideas because farming was always going to change.

But just as important as all that were the friends I made there. The combination of new experiences, being away from home and going into student residence resulted in memories that will last forever.

During the last 40 years I was only able to keep in contact with a few of my friends. But helping to organize a reunion after all that time reopened a part of my life that bridged my school years and adulthood.

### Class of '83

On Nov. 11, nine graduates of the Class of '83 celebrated our 40th anniversary of our graduation. Through the use of social media and the internet, we were able to contact about half of the graduating class. And in the end, a good group made it back to campus to revisit

# Bonds formed 40 years ago are still there

## Reunion drives home importance Mac played in our lives

the Ceilidh, the Centennial Centre, the classrooms and the barns. Some returning grads came from near and others from far, including parts of Ontario and the Maritimes. A special thanks goes out to Mac professor Peter Enright for being our host.

When I arrived at Harrison House, it was as if we never went our separate ways after graduation. It was clear, the bond that held us together as friends during college had never been broken. We were able to pick up right where we had left off, but with 40 years of experiences to share.

We all recognized each other right away. Nobody had to guess who was walking through the door. No one's personality had changed. One grad wrote that to him no one had aged. It was pretty cool to reconnect without any hesitation or awkward moments.

### Farming was common thread

We all studied agriculture. That shared vocation remained a part of our lives ever since. Most of us continued in some sort of animal or grain production, horticulture or maple syrup operation. Each building we entered brought back memories of good times, embarrassing moments and the mischief we got into. But no one was ever expelled.

Needless to say, the beer was cheap in those days, and \$10 went very far. Stories about all the teachers who we had and the impact they had on us were also shared.

It was incredible to hear how our lives had changed since 1983. Tales of how the farms transformed were told, and how children and grandchildren

shape our present lives. The evening was capped with a wonderful supper at Cunningham's Pub in Ste. Anne.

In the end, it was difficult to say goodbye to old friends, but new

memories had been made.

For me, 40 years was a very long time, but being with the gang again, it made my time at Mac seem like it was just yesterday.

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## NOTICE TO ALL SHEEP PRODUCERS

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You have until Friday, **December 1, 2023** to order the letter "L" tags which will be used to identify the lambs that will be born by the end of December 2023.



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From Monday, **December 4, 2023**, you will be able to order the letter "M" tags to identify the lambs that will be born from January 1, 2024.

For more information:

**1 866 270-4319**

Monday to Friday (except holidays)  
From 8:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. and from 1 to 4:30 p.m.

# New study shows farmers shoulder more stress, depression than others

**Brenda O'Farrell**  
*The Advocate*

Farmers have higher rates of stress, depression and anxiety compared with the general population, according to a new study published this fall.

In fact, the levels of stress and anxiety are becoming so pervasive among agricultural producers that it has been described as a mental-health crisis, according to the report published by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

One of the reasons for the accelerations, say the study's authors, is the fact that efforts to address the situation have focused on care rather than addressing the underlying causes of poor farmer mental health – financial uncertainty and the climate crisis.

"Key factors contributing to the economic precarity of farmers and

farm workers include unfettered corporate concentration in the food sector, consolidation and financialization of farmland, climate change and trade liberalization," the report states.

Based on these findings, this report makes the following six recommendations:

**Recommendation 1:** Implement policies that enhance economic stability for farmers and farm workers. Since economic instability is a key driver of poor mental health, implementing policies to enhance economic stability for farmers and farm workers is critical. These include policies that address key drivers of economic uncertainty, like commodity volatility, corporate concentration and the climate crisis. Stronger competition policies also would foster a more equitable distribution of power within the food system.

**Recommendation 2:** Enhance supports to farmers transitioning to sustainable farming practices. Promoting the adoption of sustainable farming practices and agro-ecological approaches would reduce greenhouse gas emissions and enhance crop productivity, soil fertility and biodiversity.

**Recommendation 3:** Include food sovereignty in the federal goals for agriculture. The Canadian government should be facilitating the growth of sustainable and local food systems. This includes prioritizes the health and well-being of farmers, farm workers, communities and the environment.

**Recommendation 4:** Rebuild rural infrastructure. To counter intensifying rural de-population in agricultural communities across Canada, governments at all levels need to revitalize and rebuild rural infrastructure, including

schools, hospitals and transportation and communication systems.

**Recommendation 5:** Address on-going discrimination and violence in the farming sector. In order to make an inclusive farming environment, governments must take meaningful action against violence towards Indigenous, Black and racialized groups, as well as 2SLGBTQ+ individuals and women.

**Recommendation 6:** Expand access to mental health care for farmers and support existing farm organizations that are providing support, advocacy and research. Meaningful action is needed to improve the living and working conditions of Canadian farmers. A comprehensive approach that considers the upstream drivers of farmer mental health will help foster a more resilient and sustainable agricultural sector while improving the well-being of farmers across Canada.

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## Trends in agriculture



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Look around and see the warning signs – from first snowfalls, to neighbours who might need help.



**Chris Judd**  
*The Advocate*

# Heed the warnings on all fronts

Ask any hunter: The first training they receive is: "If you are lost, fire three shots in the air." If there is no response, then fire three more shots shortly after.

This is a universal distress call.

If you are in the city and you are awakened in the night by a gunshot, take cover and call the police.

These are literal warning shot, but warning shots come in many forms.

Recently, when we looked out the window, we received a warning shot to remind us that our snow tires should be on.

When you see the first car sliding into the ditch, it's another warning. Be thankful it wasn't you.

As winter driving season has started, it should also serve as a warning that the snowblower should be serviced, fuelled and ready for a "real snowstorm." It's also a warning that

"everything" that might damage the snowblower, should be picked up and put safely away for the winter.

A few years ago, I had forgotten where I parked my snowblower when I went to put it on the rear of my tractor after a big snowstorm arrived. The strong winds had completely covered up the blower. I didn't find it until spring, when the snowbank melted.

Some warnings are harder to see.

Ever since the first lockdowns at the beginning of COVID-19 – when everything changed, from working habits, eating habits, the frequency of personal interactions and prices started rising – there was an increase in mental health problems.

It happened everywhere. There was also a worldwide increase in suicides. This was first noticed in farming areas.

As more people ate at home more because they had stopped eating out, there was a lot less food being wasted. This resulted in a notable decrease in

total food consumption and a reduction of farm production.

Even before COVID, many farms were running on a very tight margin. Our county has escaped flooding, wildfires, tornados and hurricanes, but we have recently lost some young people by suicide. There were also attempted suicides and these severe mental health results that appeared in all walks of life were definitely attributed to an increase in stress.

This problem must be addressed immediately by all means available. More people need to be concerned about their neighbours. Watch out for them. Talk to them. Listen to them. Help your neighbours.

Every day when we watch the news, we are reminded of the terrible unrest and killing in too many parts of the world. It has been going on periodically for thousands of years. In most cases, those wars were started because of language, religion, jealousy or just

pure greed. Let this be a "warning shot" to all Canadians. We live in the most desirable country in the world. Too many of our politicians and citizens want to impose their religion (or lack of), their language, their politics on others. They want better pay, shorter work times. They want to impose their culture on others.

Let this be "a warning shot" – a reminder – that tolerance of other values must be respected and our differences enjoyed, not squashed.

Recently; I have had the opportunity to be involved in a worldwide project to promote sustainable agriculture and agri-tourism involving more than 90 countries. Even farmers who live in some of those war-torn countries are members. If farmers who farm in war-torn countries still have faith in improving our planet, surely Canadian farmers can also be assured of their future.





# 'Suddenly, I felt a calling'

Montréal producer wanted to be worthy of being part of family operation

**Andrew McClelland**  
*The Advocate*

Sometimes, coming to the realization of what you want to do in life comes slowly, after trying out a number of career options. And sometimes, it just hits you like a tonne of bricks.

It was definitely a tonne-of-bricks moment for Alexandre Verdonck. He grew up in Ste. Marthe, about 70 kilometres west of Montreal, on the farm his grandfather bought in the 1950s. A farm kid all his life, some of his earliest memories are of tending to the land.

"My first memory of working on the farm is probably when I was 5 or 6 years old, helping my parents pick rocks in the fields with my brother," the 24-year-old said. "It isn't much, but it's a good introduction of learning to do long, hard work with no salary for long-term benefits."

Agricultural entrepreneurship runs deep in the family. Verdonck's grandfather and great-uncle formed the company, Belcan, which sold alfalfa cubes and fertilizer. In 2001, Verdonck's father, aunt and uncle, combined resources and land to form Groupe Stell-Ag, growing corn, soybeans, wheat and peas for the Bonduelle food group.

But still, Verdonck wasn't sure agriculture was for him.

"I was kind of a lost kid in high school," he said. "I didn't really know what I wanted to do growing up."

As graduation loomed, Verdonck found himself casting about for a career path and reflecting on his future.

## Looking for direction

"I guess it was because of my lack of maturity at the time — I never really saw farming as an option, even though it had been staring at me my whole life," he explained.

"Suddenly, I felt a calling to pursue my career in hopes of one day taking over the farm business, and hopefully becoming worthy of it."

That calling sent him to the Farm Management and Technology program at Macdonald Campus in Ste. Anne de Bellevue. Although he was a farm kid, Verdonck said the ag knowledge of many of his peers was a bit intimidating.

"I'd be lying if I said that I was anywhere near the level of competence of some of my peers when we started the program," he said. "These ambitious farmer kids, who had been involved in their farm business probably since they



COURTESY ALEXANDRE VERDONCK

Alexandre Verdonck of Ste. Marthe felt he needed a solid foundation in production techniques and agricultural economics before returning to work on the family farm. "Events like the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have had major effects on the prices of grain, fertilizer, fuel and other commodities that our farms depend on," said the 24-year-old.

were able to hold a shovel, really opened my eyes. I still admire them to this day."

Verdonck graduated from FMT in 2019, and then continued on at Mac in Agricultural Economics, a degree he felt he needed to become a successful farm manager in the current climate.

## Wanted to gain a better edge

"I wanted to gain an edge with how to manage my farm better with regards to global events," Verdonck explained. "Wars, pandemics, political conflicts — so many factors affect farming in relation to input and output prices, and the ability to adequately market commodities through unstable supply chains."

With two degrees under his belt, Verdonck has returned to the family farm, working the 2,000 acres Groupe

Stell-Ag has in crop production and helping with expansions. Recently, the business has started a broiler operation with a 23,000-bird-capacity barn.

"This is a very new field for us since we've never had animals before," Verdonck said. "So it's an adaptation to say the least. The goal was to diversify the enterprise and not rely so heavily on grain for our source of income."

Stell-Ag is also currently switching over to a no-till system on its acreage and has begun acting as the local dealer for Environmental Tillage Systems, a project in its infancy that the Verdoncks hope will also diversify their revenue streams.

Alexandre has come a long way from not knowing if agriculture is right for him. But after proving himself worthy

of making a huge contribution to the family farm, he's also become a capable and articulate producer with much to say about the future of farming.

## Support needed

"I think farmers just want support from non-farming people rather than criticism," he said.

"We don't necessarily need people to know the difference between a grain combine and a forage harvester, what a corn tassel is, or even why biosecurity is important in a poultry barn, but just a general understanding that we are dealing with big enterprises that depend on many factors in order to survive. A bit of gratitude for the food you enjoy every day is all we ask."



**Martin Caron**  
UPA President

# Attempts made to streamline regulations for artisanal producers

Quebec's National Assembly recently passed Bill 17, an act to amend various provisions for the main purpose of reducing regulatory and administrative burden. Its objective aligns with the government's commitments in this area, namely "reducing red tape, which quite often inundates our businesses," as Economy Minister Christopher Skeete put it.

This piece of legislation – the third one dealing with administrative easing since 2021 – contains 40 measures affecting a range of sectors, including alcoholic beverages. This bill includes a number of red-tape-reduction measures, which represents a step in the right direction.

For example, holders of small-scale production permits will now be allowed to sell alcohol and spirits made from cereal grains, potatoes and whey.

But in spite of the changes made, the legislation still remains complex and incoherent in several respects. Numerous permits are available, but only the small-scale production permit for alcoholic beverages allows farmers to profit from the ingredients they

grow and the processing knowledge they possess.

## Making a case in Quebec

Speaking before a parliamentary committee on Sept. 21, we pointed out that Quebec had more than 400 small-scale production permit holders as of June 2023. That is double the figure from 2018. Behind these permits are small and medium-sized agricultural enterprises that showcase made-in-Quebec alcohol and expertise. Our artisanal drink makers need less hassle in their daily lives more than ever. Accordingly, we worked with the province's cider, mead and honey alcohol producers' associations – officially known as the Producteurs de cidre du Québec and the Association des producteurs d'hydromels et d'alcools de miel du Québec – to formulate a series of recommendations to help develop this promising sector even further.

We said that if the administrative burden were truly alleviated, we would soon see a system where producers could subcontract delivery operations, where the periodic reports producers have to submit to authorities would be optimized,



BRENT HOFACKER/SHUTTESTOCK.COM

The UPA questions why certain artisanal producers, like those who make honey-based spirits – are not allowed to sell their wares directly to restaurants, grocery stores and at farmers' markets.

and where our system of controlling beverages in circulation would be modernized. Our antiquated system of marking and stamping alcoholic beverages would also be scrapped – something the industry has been awaiting since 2018, even though Bill 170 had set June 2020 as the deadline for this.

Simplifying producers' lives would also mean letting them grow multiple kinds of ingredients under the same licence. This would allow them to produce and process secondary crops by optimizing the use of costly processing equipment.

## Advocating for equal treatment

Giving all small-scale producers equal treatment, regardless of what kind of drink they produce and sell, is another priority. It is hard to believe that only certain artisanal producers are allowed to sell their wares directly to restaurants, to grocery stores and at farmers' markets.

How can we bar an artisanal producer from selling honey-based spirits at a farmers' market, for example, while

the producer in the next stall can sell wine, cider or beer?

Apart from the many other examples I could list, our message to parliamentarians at the committee meeting was that a profound regulatory overhaul is needed to simplify the permit system and reduce administrative hoops producers have to jump through.

Disappointingly, our recommendations were not incorporated, even though the affected producers' groups are in agreement with them.

Bill 17 would have been an ideal opportunity to give our artisanal alcohol products a boost and further highlight our outstanding artisans. It looks like this will have to wait until the next opportunity comes around.

We will, of course, be taking part in the new consultation on the future of the sector, which was announced along with the passing of the bill. That said, the government will have to up its game in terms of efficiency, productivity and innovation, as producers have often said.



L'Union des producteurs agricoles

To all agricultural and forestry producers, partners in the agri-food sector, and government stakeholders

We cordially invite you to attend the 99<sup>th</sup> General Congress of the Union des producteurs agricoles, which will be held on December 5, 6 and 7, 2023 at the Quebec City Convention Centre, located at 900 René-Lévesque Boulevard East.

Delegate and guest registration will take place on December 5, 2023, starting at 8:00 a.m. The first working session will begin at 10:00 a.m. the same day.

Please note that amendments to the *Règlement sur les contributions des fédérations et des syndicats spécialisés à l'Union des producteurs agricoles* and the *Règlement régissant le Fonds de défense professionnelle* are expected.

I remind you that, again this year, the congress will be paperless. You must be duly registered to attend the Congress.

**Charles-Félix Ross**  
Director General



# Animal rights group mounts constitutional challenge to Ontario anti-farm trespass law

**Brenda O'Farrell**  
*The Advocate*

An animal rights group is challenging the Ontario government in court, claiming the province's law that bans undercover investigations of animal cruelty on farms is unconstitutional.

The non-profit group Animal Justice says the law – the *Security from Trespass and Protecting Food Safety Act* – violates the federal Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The law, which was enacted in 2020, bans activists from going undercover to investigate animal cruelty at farms and slaughterhouses. They were in court late last month in Toronto.

The group's case puts forward the argument that the fundamental freedom of expression protected by the charter includes what it calls the "expressive activity" that focuses on the treatment of animals in the farming industry.

The same freedom of expression should also include the actions of individuals who choose to gather outside slaughterhouses to "show compassion to animals in their last moments of life."

The group's lawyer, according to a report by the CBC, said the work to obtain so-called undercover video

footage and its dissemination is an exercise of rights protected by the charter. The law infringes on the right of free expression, peaceful assembly and the presumption of innocence until proven guilty.

The group argues there is a distinction between illegal occupations of farms, or violent raids, which are illegal, and undercover filming. A section of the law that is being challenged makes it illegal to obtain a job at a farm under false pretenses in order to videotape operations in a covert manner.

In a statement issued as the case opened, Ontario's Attorney General simply said the law is constitutional.

The statement read: "The legislation does not impede expression by activists, journalists or anyone else, nor does it otherwise breach the charter."

The law, which can fine trespassers to a maximum of \$15,000 on the first offence, came about after livestock producers pressed the provincial government to take action against trespassers and people who demonstrate at processing plants.

The hearing wrapped up in early November. A ruling in the case is not expected until early 2024.

## CPTAQ orders stop to backfilling in Mercier

**Brenda O'Farrell**  
*The Advocate*

The Commission de protection du territoire agricole du Québec has ordered four companies to cease excavation operations in the town of Mercier in the Montérégie area.

The companies – 9403-0749 Québec Inc., Les Entreprises Canbec Construction Inc., Excavations Bergevin & Laberge Inc. and Les productions maraîchères Bourget et frères Inc. – were ordered to stop backfilling parts of a former sand pit on land owned by Bourget et frères. Authorities claim contaminants were detected in the backfill material, citing its proximity to underground wells.

"The commission's mission is to

ensure the maintenance of the integrity of agricultural land throughout Quebec," said Stéphane Labrie, president of the CPTAQ. "Individuals and companies not respecting the obligations of the law and the conditions of authorizations granted by the commission must be denounced and called upon to correct their deviations with regard to our agricultural land."

The companies have until the end of November to submit proof they hold the proper authorization to carry out the backfilling. Failure could result in a second order being issued by the CPTAQ to rehabilitate the site, including removing all fill material transported to the location, as well as provide a rehabilitation plan.

### END OF THE ROW



IAN GRANT, THE ADVOCATE

The pilot and co-pilot of this harvester make the final pass in a field in Ste. Justine de Newton, bringing another harvest to an end for another year.

## Upcoming QFA videoconference

Participate from the comfort of your home. The QFA's fun and informative series of videoconferences continues throughout the year. Come say hello to English-speaking farmers from across Quebec as we get together on Zoom and learn about the big issues in farming today.

**Wednesday, January 24, 2024 7:30 p.m.**

### Claim Your Space: The Farmer's Survival Guide for Women

with April Stewart, President, AlbaPR

Zoom Link:

[https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82763766116?](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82763766116?pwd=VXVzN25GcGhOaXQ1b2pGRVBTSzdGdz0)

[pwd=VXVzN25GcGhOaXQ1b2pGRVBTSzdGdz0](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82763766116?pwd=VXVzN25GcGhOaXQ1b2pGRVBTSzdGdz0)

**Meeting ID: 827 6376 6116**

**Passcode: 779555**

*The best place to find news, links and passcodes regarding QFA's Zoom meetings is at our Facebook Group:*  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/306871089363565/>

*To be added to our email list so you never miss a videoconference, write to [qfa\\_advocate@yahoo.ca](mailto:qfa_advocate@yahoo.ca)*





## QFA videoconferences

# How farmers' emotional awareness affects their mental health

**Emily Leeson**

*For Farm Credit Canada*

Resilient, tough, capable of meeting any challenge – these are the narratives that producers tend to perpetuate about themselves, explains Dr. Jody Carrington, psychologist, best-selling author and public speaker.

But that doesn't paint the full picture. The data is clear: the last few years have been stressful for Canadians. Since the beginning of the pandemic, domestic strife is higher and divorce has increased by 30 per cent, Carrington points out.

Producers are not immune – and they endure the stress of hard work, long days and fluctuating economies on top of it all.

Carrington knows the unique demands producers face.

"We put a big emphasis on how to fix our finances, what we're growing, what the cattle prices are doing," she said. But the reality is that the industry is always going to have ups and downs.

"It's so critically important that we are OK," Carrington explained. "Our farms will not be OK unless we are OK."

### Recognize emotions to help reduce stress

Producers who recognize, acknowledge and address the pressure they're under are better equipped to take the steps needed to survive and thrive in stressful times.

Emotional awareness, also referred to as "emotional intelligence" is the ability to identify and regulate emotions. It is considered one of the key attributes of successful leaders. This includes emotional literacy, that is, the ability to recognize the nuances of what you're feeling.

For example, you may feel angry at first, but when you dive deeper, you realize that you're actually frustrated or anxious.

Producers don't need to be stalwart beacons of silence through tough times. They need to be equipped with the skills to identify and deal with emotions constructively.

When you're emotionally aware, you can engage in constructive conflict and work through strong emotions to help in the decision-making process. Leaders with strong emotional awareness can guide their team and their business



BUDIMIR JEVTIC/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Producers need to be able to discuss their challenges and their successes. They need to connect. They need others to lean on. They've got to be able to talk it out.

through adversity – and improve their own mental health in the process.

### Learn to communicate your emotions

For farm leaders, Carrington says communication is really where the need is highest.

"We need an emotional language," she said.

Producers need to be able to discuss their challenges and their successes. They need to connect. They need others to lean on. They've got to be able to talk it out.

"We have never been this disconnected," she said, adding that it's not just due to the global pandemic.

Over the course of a generation, the industry has undergone a seismic shift in both the boots-on-the-ground management and the day-to-day reality of farm family life.

How farm families function has changed. While today's producers may well be sending texts rather than sorting out the details at the dinner table, that doesn't change the need for level-headed thinking and carefully considered communication.

Being mindful of your own emotions – able to identify what it is you are truly feeling – opens the door to those more authentic conversations.

The close-knit nature of farm life may have expanded and evolved, but those same old ties still bind.

"We still base this industry on a handshake," Carrington said. "We will never automate the importance of looking each other in the eye."

Rekindling that connection is key, Carrington explained.

"When's the last time you played cards with the neighbours?" she asked. "Let's do Sunday dinner again. Let's gather

around that fire pit again. That's what makes agriculture great: the people."

Building that connection and practising community may well be the first step in growing your own emotional awareness.

### Build emotional awareness

Producers who cultivate emotional awareness are better equipped to steer their business through turbulent times.

Self-awareness can help pave the way toward open and honest discussion. Anger and silence don't solve problems. Paying attention to your emotions, reflecting on your actions and being willing to learn from your mistakes can all set the stage for building self-awareness, which, in turn, boosts confidence.

*This article is part of Farm Credit Canada's Personal Growth series.*



# Feed-to-grain ratio shouldn't be only metric cow-calf operators focus on

**Andrew McClelland**  
*The Advocate*

Cow-calf producers have always focused on how much weight their cattle are gaining compared with how much feed they take in.

After all, it's common sense. In a business where you're ultimately paid by the pound, figuring out your profit should be simple math. Cost of production versus amount at sale, right?

But research recently conducted at the University of Saskatchewan challenges that age-old belief. In the cow-calf sector, producers can assess their cows without relying on the common yardstick of feed-use efficiency, and focus instead on how cows maintain body condition score and adapt to their environment.

"Every cow-calf producer I talk to wants the same things," said Greg Penner, professor of Ruminant Nutritional Physiology at the University of Saskatchewan. "They want a cow to maintain her body condition score under the environment and management conditions that are present. They're hoping to select a cow that is apt to meet the management conditions and does a good job."

## Study followed 100 heifers

Penner presented the findings of a study completed in 2022 at a Quebec Farmers' Association videoconference Oct. 30. That study used 100 first-calf heifers and evaluated them over two calving seasons.

Saskatchewan ranchers Duane Thompson and Ross MacDonald participated in the study by observing those heifers and awarding them a score out of 10, based on rump fat thickness, which determined how they were coping with the environment during winter feeding.

"We assessed rump fat thickness at calving," Penner said. "If you're operating within a spring calving system, rump fat thickness means that that cow is doing well under your extensive winter grazing system and has come to calving with adequate body reserves."

## Calving early counts

The second criteria in Penner's study was a cow's calving date. Cattle were given a higher ranking for being able to calve early in the season.

"But we needed to recognize that



PHOTO COURTESY OF GREG PENNER

A cow-calf operator should not simply focus on the feed-to-gain ratio, according to University of Saskatchewan professor Greg Penner. His research suggests that looking at body condition score, calving dates and adaptability are better tools for identifying the best cows.

other factors could influence calving date," Penner explained. "So cows with better body condition score at calving probably can cycle sooner in the breeding season and are maybe more prone to a successful pregnancy. We didn't want to give double weight to that aspect of the cow."

Penner's third criteria was the ability to wean a heavy calf. Cows that didn't produce a calf at all were heavily penalized in the study's scoring. Each cow was ranked on a percentile basis and observed over two years so researchers could pick out the highly efficient cows across seasons.

## Rump ratings count

After looking at the data, Penner and his team assessed the highest-performing cows had thicker rump fat, calved earlier at day 14.5 of the calving season (compared with day 30 for the lowest-performing cows), and produced 44 pounds more calf relative to their own body weight, adjusted for sex.

"In today's market with what prices are at value-per-pound, that means the more efficient cows are producing about \$90 to \$120 more," Penner said.

All cattle in the study were fed the

same diet, so it's not feed effects accounting for their higher performance.

"Instead, because high-efficient cows were lighter, they ate more as a percentage of body weight."

Using his background in ruminant physiology, Penner found that the high efficiency cows had smaller rumen digesta mass, or less undigestible fibre content. They were more efficient at getting what they needed nutritionally out of their feed.

"High-efficient cows are able to digest what's available and kick that undigested material out of the rumen at a greater rate," Penner said. "The faster those cows can cycle that weight through them, the greater the ability they have to extract nutrients."

The key, according to the study, is record-keeping – something all cow-calf producers are familiar with.

"Everybody can measure body condition score," Penner said. "Write down the measurements, your assessments, for each cow. The key to this approach is record management and record review."

## Keeping good data makes a difference

Knowing your heifers' calving dates

– even if only specifying the three-day window in which calving occurred – can be a good enough metric to selecting the most efficient of the herd.

So why has the cow-calf world been so obsessed with feed-to-gain ratio as a tool to measure the most efficient cows? Well, said Penner – a passionate researcher – a lot of that blame goes to the researchers themselves.

"Quite often as researchers we do things that are easy," he explained. "It's a path of least resistance. It's very easy to measure feed intake, very easy to measure growth in a feedlot environment."

Penner feels that research has been driven by the feedlot model, but those metrics aren't as valuable in a cow-calf operation. And he is the first to admit that, sometimes, the simplest observations serve that sector of the beef industry best.

"None of the metrics I showed are going to win a Noble prize, right? This is not a high level of sophistication. These are simple things that cow-calf operators can use if they choose to."



# The Quebec Farmers' Association is only as strong as its **membership**

It's time to renew your membership. Reminder cards will not be mailed out. So we are asking that you clip out the form below. Fill it out and send your cheque in the amount indicated and mail it in.

**We are counting on your support.** Show your pride in being part of Quebec's English-speaking community. **It only cost \$68.99.**

As soon as we receive your cheque, we will send you:

- i Your **membership card**
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- i A letter explaining the benefits of being a member

## Membership Application

Last name ..... First name.....  
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 1 year \$68.99 [\$60 + \$3 GST (5%) + \$5.99 TVQ (9.975%)]  
 2 years \$137.97 [\$120 + \$6 GST (5%) + \$11.97 TVQ (9.975%)]  
 My cheque is enclosed, payable to "Quebec Farmers' Association"  
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### Quebec Farmers' Association

555 boul. Roland Therrien, office 255  
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Receipts are issued upon request. Memberships are valid for 12 months from month of purchase.

Signature.....  
 Date.....

# The Quebec Farmers' Association would like to thank English-speaking farmers who have opted to renew their membership.

By supporting the QFA, you ensure that *The Advocate* arrives in your mailbox every month.

**Here are just a few of members who recently renewed.  
Your support makes a difference.**

**Margo Heyerhoff, North Hatley  
Winston Bresee, Sutton**

**Robert McCartney, Athelstan  
Mildred Miller, Sherbrooke**





## Climate of change



**Mitchell Beer**  
President, Smarter Shift

# Latest debate on carbon tax is all about affordability

Until late October, the debate on the federal carbon tax seemed to have been settled. But here we are – again.

The federal carbon tax is an important tool in the toolbox for getting climate change under control. A market mechanism handed down by mainstream economists and conservative politicians like Brian Mulroney, Jean Charest and Arnold Schwarzenegger, it was meant to discourage investments that boost emissions and trash the environment.

And in this latest round of discussion, it's tied to a program designed to drastically cut home heating and cooling costs by an average \$2,500 a year per participating household, and permanently reduce emissions in the bargain.

But there was zero chance that the conversation would play out that way.

For so long – for far too long – carbon pricing was the political controversy that wouldn't die, the topic that took up all the oxygen in the room whenever conversation turned to climate science, impacts and solutions. Years, not months, were lost debating and litigating the federal floor price on carbon, as the mechanism is officially known. No doubt because its opponents knew they could make political hay (even when the sun wasn't shining) by equating concern about the climate crisis and interest in clean energy with support for an unpopular new tax.

That all ended in March 2021, when the Supreme Court finally upheld the federal carbon pricing regime, in what one activist called a "love letter to the planet."

But it really did not end there.

### Ottawa did a lousy job selling plan

The controversy continued, not least because Ottawa did such a poor job of communicating a central feature of the carbon price: that quarterly rebates to Canadian households that give most of us more money back than we pay out. The system is meant to price pollution and encourage lower-carbon choices, not to make life harder for consumers. And for the most part, that's what it does.

And yet, five days before Halloween – cue the zombie apocalypse sound track – and just when you thought it



NANCY PAUWELS/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

In the end, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's latest announcement about a carve-out for carbon-tax exemption for home heating oil brought new prominence to energy efficiency, a cornerstone of the transition off carbon that has never received the attention it deserves. And it delivered a big public awareness boost to heat pumps.

was safe to go out again, carbon pricing came storming back into the headlines.

That was after Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced he was suspending the carbon tax on home heating oil for three years, while putting up new funding to make heat pumps more affordable (essentially free, actually) as an off-oil alternative.

The announcement made a lot of sense in theory, not unlike the carbon tax itself. Oil heating is two to four times more expensive than gas, and it's concentrated in the Atlantic provinces, often in low-income households that are least able to cover the cost. The price break served an immediate political objective, with about two dozen Atlantic Liberal MPs clamouring for some tax relief.

### Similar brake on gas heating now wanted

But the pushback was predictable and instantaneous, with Western premiers demanding a similar break on gas heat and agriculture groups extending the call to farm equipment and buildings. Trudeau and Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault vowed there would be no further carve-outs, but the controversy is already raising an important question: If a steadily rising carbon

tax is meant as an incentive for good behaviour, did the uncertainty created by Trudeau's announcement undercut farmers who plan to do the right thing, in their own best interest, and generate revenue from smart practices like soil carbon sequestration?

On the balance of probabilities, as long as there's no further erosion, some sense of certainty and predictability is bound to return – unless Opposition Leader Pierre Poilievre forms a government and burns the whole system to the ground.

But there's another possible result of this swirling tempest that might play very well for farm operators. This must certainly have been accidental, but Trudeau's announcement in late October brought new prominence to energy efficiency, a cornerstone of the transition off carbon that has never received the attention it deserves. And it delivered a big public awareness boost to heat pumps, an energy-saving and cost-saving bonanza that a colleague described just a year ago as the "most unsexy but essential technology that most people have never heard of." Earlier this month British Columbia Premier David Eby was spotted wearing an "I ♥ Heat Pumps" T-shirt under his suit jacket. You can't make this stuff up.

The hugely important point here is that people are not suddenly embracing heat pumps or off-oil conversions as climate solutions. It's all about affordability. If not for the irresistible political pull of another carbon tax debate. (Because, really, what else is there of any importance to talk about?) Trudeau's plan could just as easily have played as an average \$2,500-per-year cost saving for households that made the switch.

But why have a relatively calm, relatively mature discussion about what households actually need when you can just as easily set off a new round of political mud-slinging, trying to seal the fate of an unpopular government that must go to the polls in the next two years?

From the Opposition's point of view, the playbook was obvious. But it'll take some more practical thinking for the rest of us to come out ahead in this latest round of the Great Canadian Carbon Wars.

*Mitchell Beer is president of Smarter Shift in Ottawa and curator of The Energy Mix, a thrice-weekly e-digest on climate change, energy, and the low-carbon transition.*





**Paul J. Hetzler**  
ISA Certified Arborist

Children who grow up on farms are privileged, though they may not always see the truth of that until later on. It seems much of the “digital generation” become adults, chronologically, at least, without knowing how to use a hammer, let alone fix a flat or do an oil change.

Farm kids learn many skills that serve them well, both on and off the farm. These can range from tractor safety, welding and engine repair to greenhouse management, direct marketing, and produce traceability. In every case, farm kids learn to work hard and problem-solve in the real world. In the process, they gain self-confidence. This is priceless.

But there are more fundamental, if lesser known, benefits of rural life. Kids who grow up surrounded by nature have a big mental, physical and cognitive lead over urban kids. There is solid proof that daily exposure to things like trees, animals, rocks, birds and open sky makes children feel happier and more confident. They're more active, less anxious and learn better.

Scientists haven't yet mapped all the neurological and biochemical pathways behind these effects. But controlled experiments from around the world agree the positive changes that happen when kids live close to nature are real.

According to a 2018 Danish study, youngsters who get outside on a regular basis have a lowered risk of depression, schizophrenia, eating disorders and substance use later in life.

### Outdoors helps attention

In 2011, researchers from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign found that being outdoors lessens childhood ADHD symptoms. In fact, a growing number of psychologists now think time spent in nature could restore attention on a long-term basis.

Here's an eye-opener: When children simply play with dirt, their anxiety and stress levels drop more than play that does not involve getting muddy. And they feel happier. This makes me wonder if breathing dirt while doing field work on an open-cab tractor does the same.

Connecting with nature also improves what's known as eudaimonic well-being, a deep sense one belongs

# Nature is a child's best educator



EKATERINA POKROVSKY/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Letting children play in the dirt has been shown by studies to make them kinder, happier and more able to learn.

in the world. In other words, farming helps give life meaning. It's probably one reason so many farmers can keep going in the face of daily challenges.

In addition, dirt (or soil) is vital for strong childhood immune systems. A study done in Finland looked at 10 urban day-care centres with concrete play yards. At five centres, researchers built “forests” for kids to use, trucking in good topsoil and native trees, shrubs and flowers. After four weeks, blood tests showed that the immune systems of kids who played in the dirt were notably healthier than their initial baseline at the start of the study, and the control group.

### Effects on immune systems

The research team concluded a nature-poor childhood, the norm in our culture where 80 per cent are urban-dwellers, results in “uneducated immune systems.” This may render kids prone to immune-mediated ailments like severe allergies and celiac disease.

Immune systems aren't the only things “educated” by nature. School performance is enhanced as well.

Pupils who spend time outdoors absorb material faster and retain more of what they learn. And the longer kids spend in fields, forests or streams, the bigger their academic gains are.

A 2019 study from the University of Chicago showed connecting with

nature “improves working memory, cognitive flexibility and attentional control.”

In another experiment, students who looked out at green space for 40 seconds before a test did better than those who didn't. Several other studies have shown listening to natural sounds raises marks on tough exams.

### Nature inspires kindness

It's been documented that nature makes kids nicer: primary-school students are kinder to peers and adults after forays into nature than after visiting urban landmarks.

Researchers at the University of Rochester report exposure to the natural world makes people tend to nurture relationships, value community more and be more generous.

Fortuitously, kids have an innate attraction to nature. If adults want to encourage kids to explore and examine the real world, stuff like magnifiers, notebooks, trowels and containers can enrich their experience. Let kids bring nature indoors by making space (within reason) at home for moss, rocks, bark and other found items.

Nothing beats direct experience for getting kids' attention. Young folks will remember yellow birch if they make wintergreen tea from its twigs. Spicebush smells like cloves, while black cherry reeks of bitter almond. Teen girls

have particular respect for the white pine when they learn of its historic link with North American women's rights. Kids and youth can learn to make a superb pink lemonade from the berries of staghorn sumac. And it's OK to bring in a little tech into the picture now and then; free phone apps to identify plants, insects and birds abound.

The summer I was 13, I began full-time work on a neighbour's farm, a 2,700-acre mix of dry beans, corn, wheat, contract-grown sweet corn and dairy-replacement heifers. From that point, I was hooked, staying on for 10 more years. I wasn't aware of the benefits of being out in nature back then, but these likely factored into the picture. The job came at a time it was best I was out of the house, and it's fair to say the self-confidence and time in nature I got on the farm saved my teenage life. The hard-earned pay was welcome, but not the main benefit.

Even if children move away and don't take over the family farm, they've profited from starting out there. Most of us have kids in our lives – nieces, nephews, grandkids – in urban areas. Let's take them out to dig holes and get muddy as much as possible. It brings out their best nature.

*Paul Hetzler is an ISA Certified Arborist, and a former Cornell Extension educator.*



# How long do cows wait to be milked in a free-flow automated milking system?

Laura Solano, DMV, PhD  
Courtney Halbach, DMV  
and Nigel Coo, DMV  
For Lactanet

When talking about long periods of standing, a common scenario that comes to mind is cows standing in a holding area, waiting to be milked. On the flip side, we tend to assume that in automated milking systems, cows spend little to no time waiting to be milked, as they have the freedom to choose when to access the milking robot without leaving their home pen.

Whether in a parlor system or in automated milking systems, we know that long periods of standing are detrimental to cows' health and comfort, increasing their chances to develop lameness and hoof lesions.

We explored cow behaviour around milking time in a free-flow automated milking system. We conducted an observational study where we used video analysis from 40 cows over two days in a commercial herd using a free-flow automated milking system (Figure 1). We were curious to know how long cows wait to be milked, which factors have an impact on waiting time and what choices cows make when they are unsuccessful in accessing the milking robot.

The study herd consisted of 180 Holstein cows with three robots and averaged 95 pounds of milk per cow per day over the prior six months. The study pen consisted of a mixed-parity group of 59 cows, and the free-flow milking robot was installed on the side of the barn, parallel to the pen. There was a fetch pen that remained open throughout the day so cows could enter voluntarily, but was closed three times a day, when cows were fetched into the pen. The pen had a three-row stall

layout with 60 deep-bedded sand stalls and concrete flooring alleys.

## How long do cows wait to be milked?

On average, cows visited the robot to wait to be milked six times per day, spent 15 minutes waiting per visit, for a total waiting time of 90 minutes per day. This daily waiting time is shorter than that reported for conventional parlor milked herds, but what was surprising was the large variation in waiting time among cows. Some cows were very efficient and only spent a total of five minutes a day waiting to be milked, while other cows spent more than five hours per day.

## What were the differences?

Parity, days in milk and their combination had an impact on daily waiting time (Figure 2). First parity cows in early lactation had more frequent and longer visits to the waiting area, resulting in long waiting times (~2 h/d). But in late lactation, this behaviour gradually became more like that of older cows, with fewer and shorter visits to the waiting area, resulting in shorter waiting times (~1 h/d).

It is likely that competition and 'inexperience' played a role in the long waiting time observed in first parity cows early in lactation. They often had to compete with mature cows at the robot entryway while trying to overcome the steep learning curve of using the robot.

Another factor that had an impact on daily waiting time was related to the voluntary and repeated use of the fetch pen throughout the day to access the robot. Cows that showed this behaviour on average waited 40 minutes longer and made fewer visits to the waiting area compared with cows that rarely entered the fetch pen. Even among first

parity cows, those that voluntarily and repeatedly used the fetch pen waited about 1 hour per day longer on average than those who did not.

## If at first you don't succeed ...

If cows aren't milked when they want to be, a free-flow traffic design gives them freedom to choose from a variety of alternative activities, like lying down, drinking or eating.

So what choices do cows make when they fail to access the robot?

Most of the time, cows chose to move farther from the robot and they continued to stand idle in the alley or in a stall on the lookout for an opportunity to get milked. As time passed, cows moved to the feedbunk or a water trough about 25 per cent of the time. But there was a much higher probability that cows would either continue standing in the alley, in a stall, or return to the waiting area. This suggests that the desire to be milked continues to influence behavioral decisions after a failed attempt to access the robot.

## The longer cows wait

On average, cows spent 10 hours and 50 minutes a day lying down, with a wide variation from five to 16 hours per day. Cows that had long waiting times (more than two hours per day) tended to spend less time, an average of 1 hour and 40 minutes a day, compared with cows with shorter waiting times (less than two hours per day).

## Ways to mitigate competitive behaviour

A well-designed robot entry: Cows that voluntarily used the fetch pen tended to wait longer because they were at a disadvantage when competing with cows

outside of the fetch pen for access to the robot. Cows in the main waiting area exerted pressure over cows waiting in the fetch pen by forcing their way past the end of the swing gate. This battling of "who is the strongest cow pushing the swing gate" could be mitigated by having gating at the robot's entryway that protects the neck and shoulder of the next cow in line (Figure 3). A design element of this kind would discourage dominant cows from displacing subordinate cows by limiting their interaction to the rear of the waiting cow.

Robot exit area: After a successful milking, some cows exiting the robot, displaced cows waiting in line to gain access to the robot. This displacement was sometimes a clear aggressive interaction from dominant cows but sometimes it was due to limited space in the robot area during periods of high robot visit frequency ("traffic jams"). An AMS layout where cows exit away from the robot entrance and are not able to interfere with cows waiting to access the robot could prevent this behaviour.

Stocking density: Maintaining an adequate stocking density of cows per robot may lessen the dominance effect, decrease standing time and decrease the impact of failed attempts to access the robot.

Grouping strategies: Adoption of grouping strategies to reduce competitive behaviour, especially towards primiparous cows, along with training heifers to use the robot before calving may help reduce waiting times.

*This article was adapted from a scientific article published in JDS Communications, Vol. 3, Solano et al., "Milking time behaviour of dairy cows in a free-flow automated milking system," 426-430, Copyright Elsevier (2022).*

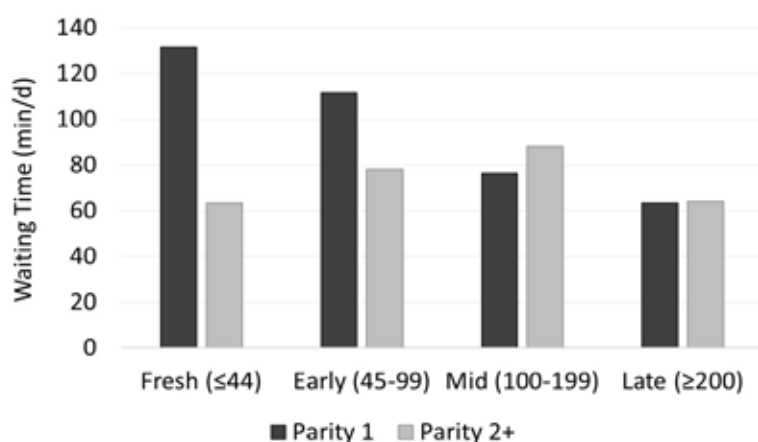


Figure 2. Daily waiting time (min) per parity and stage of lactation.

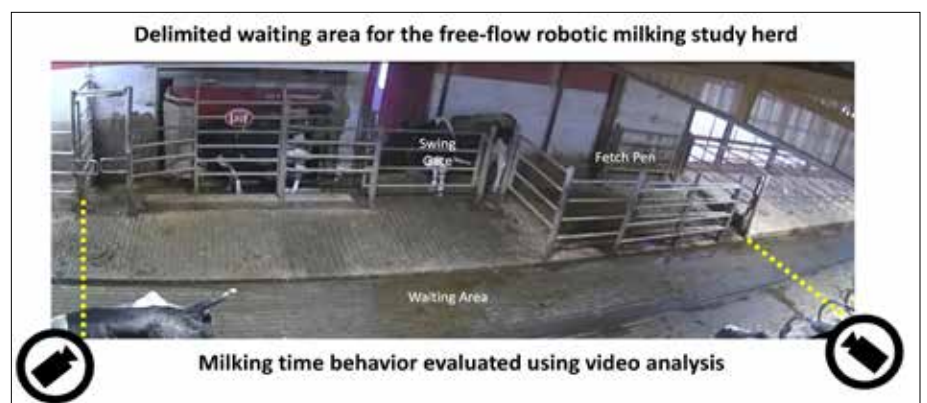


Figure 1. During video analysis, a waiting area for milking (represented by the yellow dash lines) was delineated to resemble a commitment or holding pen close to the milking unit. This waiting area of approximately 49 m<sup>2</sup> (530 ft<sup>2</sup>) included the space in front of the milking robot and in front of the fetch pen. The time spent in the waiting area was determined as the time when each cow entered and exited the waiting area with or without a successful milking.



## Brazil's erratic weather putting soybean, corn yields at risk

**Ramzy Yelda**  
Senior Market Analyst  
Quebec Grain Growers

Weather patterns in Brazil have been erratic since mid-September, the beginning of the soybean season in that country. The north central part of the country has been hot and very dry, while the southern part has been excessively wet. This has delayed soybean seeding, which usually takes off in October. Moreover, some growers have had to reseed their fields because of drought in the north central regions, or because of flooding in the wet zone.

It is still early, however, and no permanent damage has been done, but the situation is worrisome. Brazil is, by far, the world's largest exporter of soybeans. This year, the country has

also become the largest exporter of corn. Soybeans that will be seeded at the end of November or in December will be outside the optimal window, potentially reducing yields.

Moreover, a delayed soybean crop will push back the seeding of the second corn safrinha crop. Safrinha corn accounts for more than 75 per cent of the total corn production. It also supplies the export markets.

The optimal period for seeding this corn is until mid-February. A large portion of the soybean harvest is likely to be delayed until late February, which means a significant percentage of the safrinha corn will probably be seeded in March. This could put its yield potential at higher risk since the rainy season usually ends in May.

### Snow getting in the way of harvest

The snowfall that has hit a number of Quebec regions recently has been a source of discouragement and difficulty this harvest season. The Producteurs de grains du Québec (PGQ) has received calls from grain farmers indicating that, in some cases, the soybean harvest is not finished or that the corn harvest is just getting under way. Farmers are also having difficulty accessing their fields. In fact, the reported average surface area of corn harvested – about 14 percent, according to the Financière agricole du Québec (FADQ) – conceals a wide range of situations in terms of progress, yield, quality and moisture. Producers are finding themselves in a precarious situation owing to these extremes of variability.

The PGQ invites producers to get in touch to talk about any difficulties they may be encountering. This information will help develop an accurate picture of the situation. We want producers to know we support and encourage them!

To contact the PGQ, call 450-679-0540.

- Ramzy Yelda, Senior Market Analyst, ext. 8116 or ryelda@pgq.ca
- Étienne Lafrance, Market Information Officer, ext. 8412 or elafrance@pgq.ca

### Order of initiative to reform FADQ insurance programs: the PGQ responds

On Oct. 23, Official Opposition Critic for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, André Fortin, proposed that the Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries, Energy and Natural Resources adopt an order of initiative to reform the insurance programs of the Financière agricole du Québec (FADQ). The PGQ's reaction to this proposal was not long in coming:

"The PGQ welcomes the proposal that a parliamentary commission be held to examine how the FADQ's programs may be adapted to today's context. The issue is an important one for the Quebec grain sector: not only are we being confronted with climate variations in a particularly direct way, but also producers in remote regions are having to contend with higher transport and input costs. We have brought the needs of remote regions to the attention of the premier of Quebec, so that he makes them a government priority."

### Two big events to mark on your calendar

The PGQ's provincial affiliated syndicate day will be held Dec. 13. The entire PGQ team is working to develop the topics for discussion at this event, which will bring together directors and secretaries from all 14 affiliated syndicates.

The PGQ also has a new event to add to your calendar: Wednesday, Jan. 31, 2024, is the day of the Forum on research needs in grain production. More details will be announced closer to the date. The event is open to producers, professionals and researchers. Attendees will discuss today's hot topics pertaining to research and development.

Both activities will take place at the Best Western Hotel Universel in Drummondville.



The Producteurs de grains du Québec (PGQ) represent the interests of about 11,000 Quebec grain farmers. In addition to liaising with farmers, the PGQ engages in monitoring, analysis, collaboration and communication with industry and government. The PGQ is responsible for acting on various economic and political levels, specifically in the following domains: market information, commerce and market development, research, technology transfer and consulting, financial protection, and risk management.



## The Miner Report

# Study shows positive results when fresh cows offered free-choice hay

**Emily Bourdeau**

*William H. Miner Agricultural  
Research Institute*

The transition period for dairy cows, defined as the 21 days before calving to 21 days after calving, is a challenging time. Cows undergo metabolic and physiological changes. During the early days of lactation, the energy demand for milk production often exceeds a cow's energy intake, resulting in the animal experiencing a state of negative energy balance (NEB).

To alleviate the length of this NEB, producers often provide high-starch diets to fresh cows.

While a high-starch diet, which provides energy, may be beneficial for some fresh cows, it may not work for all, as high amounts of a fermentable carbohydrate source can increase the risk of subacute ruminal acidosis, or negatively impact intake.

The way cows respond to the fresh diet will vary. Some will be successful on a high-starch diet right off, while others may have a more difficult transition, and require more time to adapt. They may also search for more fiber. Providing a single ration for fresh cows can be difficult when cows metabolic needs vary post-calving.



DMYTRO/STOCK.ADOBE.COM

Not all fresh cows respond well to a high-fibre diet, often they might need a longer transition time.

### U of Alberta study

A study recently by researchers Lauren Engelking and Masahito Oba from the University of Alberta published in the *Journal of Dairy Science* evaluated the effects of offering free-choice hay to fresh cows as a way to provide cows with a more individualized diet.

For example, providing free-choice hay can allow certain cows to increase their intake of forage neutral detergent fiber (NDF), while allowing other cows to continue consuming a high-starch diet that supports high-milk production. The study utilized 32 Holstein cows – 20 were offered free-choice timothy hay (61.6% NDF) for the first five days in milk, and 12 were not offered hay. Both groups received a common closeup (21.5% starch, 32.1% forage NDF) and fresh (26.8% starch, 23.4% forage NDF) total mixed ration (TMR).

After the first five days in milk, hay was removed, and all cows received only the fresh total mixed ration until 21 days in milk.

The researchers evaluated the effects on feed intake, milk yield, plasma

metabolites, serum inflammatory markers, rumination, gut permeability and colon expression during the first 21 days in milk.

At three days in milk, the researchers observed that cows offered free-choice hay tended to have lower serum haptoglobin concentrations. Haptoglobin is a serum inflammatory biomarker and will be nearly zero for a healthy cow but will be elevated at calving regardless of health status. Higher haptoglobin concentrations, or larger increases in concentrations of it, have been associated with the occurrence of health problems.

Within the group receiving free-choice hay, cows that consumed more hay on days 1 and 2 had smaller increases in serum amyloid A, another inflammation biomarker, and serum haptoglobin concentrations from day 1 to 3. The researchers concluded that free-choice hay may play a role in preventing the increase of serum haptoglobin concentrations, thus these cows may have had a lower risk of developing disease.

The researchers also observed some

changes with dry matter intake (DMI). Cows consuming hay on the first two days in milk had lower TMR DMI, but similar total DMI compared with cows without hay. For the first five days in milk, cows offered hay had lower TMR DMI and lower total DMI. As a result, the cows consuming hay had lower starch:forage NDF ratio (as % of total DMI).

During the carryover period from 6 to 21 days in milk, where all cows were offered only TMR, the cows that had been offered hay previously tended to still have lower TMR DMI compared with those that never received hay. There was no effect on milk yield, rumination, body weight or body condition throughout any point of the study. Since the cows offered hay tended to have lower DMI but similar milk yield compared with those not offered hay, cows offered hay during the first five days in milk tended to be more feed efficient from days 6 to 21. It is important to keep in mind that feed efficiency looks different throughout the lactation.

For example, fresh cows may have

a higher feed-efficient ratio than a mid-lactation cow, but the fresh cows are more efficient because they are mobilizing more body reserves rather than consuming TMR, which may end up causing problems down the road.

So, should fresh cows be offered free-choice hay?

It's hard to say based on results from one study. Like human diets, no matter how hard we try, TMR are not "one-size fits all." Cows are going to respond differently, especially during the transition period. Providing hay in addition to a high-starch TMR gives cows options and the opportunity to select feeds based on preference and metabolic need.

*The Miner Institute, based in Chazy, N.Y., conducts practical research on the dairy-crop interface, equine reproduction and management, and environmental conservation. Its research activities combine a global perspective with a regional application.*



HOMO COSMICOS/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Issues like soil infertility and overgrazing combined with unpredictable rainfall, floods and historic levels of drought have made farming in areas of Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique and Zimbabwe very difficult.

# New program enhances climate change adaptation in Africa

## Canadian Foodgrains Bank

A total of \$36 million from the Canadian government's Partnering for Climate initiative has been granted to the Canadian Foodgrains Bank to restore healthy landscapes and food systems in four African countries.

Nearly 40 per cent of small-scale farmers in sub-Saharan Africa experience hunger regularly, compared with only 20 per cent of the overall population, and climate change is making their fight against hunger even more challenging.

The new Nature+ (Nature Positive Food Systems for Climate Change Adaptation in East Africa) program will work directly with 75,000 women and men living in rural areas of Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

The multi-year program is focused on restoring healthy landscapes in regions that are dealing with high vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, high levels of land degradation and high levels of hunger and poverty, resulting in positive ripple effects throughout surrounding communities and landscapes.

"The devastating effects of climate change include severely increasing hunger for families living in areas that have seen their ecosystems decimated, but with concentrated, protected work, we know these landscapes and their biodiversity can be healed to restore food security for the people living in them,"

"The devastating effects of climate change include severely increasing hunger for families living in areas that have seen their ecosystems decimated, ... we know these landscapes and their biodiversity can be healed to restore food security for the people living in them."

—Andy Harrington

said Andy Harrington, executive director of the Canadian Foodgrains Bank.

"We are so grateful the Canadian government is partnering with us to do this important work."

Nature+ involves 12 locally-based partners in these four countries, with support from nine Foodgrains Bank member agencies.

Each locally-based partner is situated to best design a program that will cater to the local area's landscape, while also helping communities reduce their vulnerability to climate change and improve their livelihoods.

Unpredictable rainfall, floods and historic levels of drought are contributing to high levels of poverty and hunger, particularly for women and girls who generally experience higher levels of poverty.

In the past, healthy soils and rich biodiversity would have helped communities adapt to the changing climate, but issues like soil infertility and overgrazing have made farming much more difficult for agricultural purposes in the areas that Nature+ will focus on.

"As an organization committed to ending global hunger, this effort is undertaken with the knowledge that when landscapes are restored, the people living in these areas are better able to build a food-secure future that will benefit not only themselves, but generations to come," Harrington said.

As part of this program grant, the Foodgrains Bank is expected to raise approximately \$1.67 million.



## Zuppa Toscana



PHOTO BY CYNTHIA GUNN

Zuppa Toscana is a hearty soup that provides the nutritional boost that comes with kale and the deliciousness of sausage and bacon. Now, that's a combo.

### INGREDIENTS

**1 pound Italian sausage, casings removed**  
**4 ounces (125 g) diced bacon**  
**1 large onion chopped**  
**6 cloves garlic, minced**  
**½ cup dry white wine, optional**  
**1 ½ quarts (1.5 litres) low-sodium chicken broth**  
**1 cup water**  
**4 Russet potatoes, cut in small cubes**  
**chili flakes**  
**1 ½ cups whipping cream**  
**3 cups chopped kale, hard stems removed**  
**Parmesan cheese**

### PREPARATION

Fry the sausage in a heavy-based pot or Dutch oven over medium-high heat while breaking up the meat with the end of your wooden spoon. When browned, and cooked through (about 10 minutes), drain most of the oil, leaving about 1 teaspoon of drippings in the pot. Transfer sausage meat to a plate.

Cook the bacon in the same pot/Dutch oven over medium heat until crispy. Drain, leaving about 1 tablespoon of drippings in the pot. Transfer cooked bacon to the plate with the sausage meat.

Sauté onions in the pot and cook until soft and translucent (about 5 minutes). Add the garlic and cook for 1 minute, until fragrant. Add wine if using, and simmer for a few minutes. Increase heat to high, pour in the chicken broth and bring to a boil.

Season with salt, pepper and chili flakes.

Add the potatoes and boil until fork tender (about 10-12 minutes).

Reduce heat to medium. Stir in the heavy cream, cooked sausage, bacon and kale. Let simmer for 2 minutes, until kale leaves have softened.

Serve in warmed bowls topped with Parmesan. A crispy baguette is a must.

# Adding bacon and sausage to a dish is one way to make kale more palatable

**Cynthia Gunn**  
 QFA's Food Writer

How did I miss this one? Feels like it's as common as goulash in Austria. Or chicken soup in North America. It wasn't until our recent annual Great Granny Harvest Auction that I came across Zuppa Toscana. As always, the Wakefield Grannies auction to raise funds for the Gogos (grandmothers) of Alexandra township and Natal province in South Africa to help them raise their grandchildren was a trusty source of new ideas for dinner.

This year there were three new (to me) dishes that caught the fancy of the community. Ferocious bidding in the last half-hour while I was unable to jump into the fray meant that my basket was left empty, and dreams of doing good while simultaneously receiving a ready-made and delectable dinner were dashed. Nothing left to do, therefore, but cook them myself.

The first of these dishes features kale. A nutritional superstar it may be, but kale has always seemed kind of poky and tough. Kale is the darling of super healthy moms who like to slip it into soups and smoothies, shielding their beloved offspring from the vagaries of the world with secret doses of kale power.

I am not one of those moms, for better or for worse. But it's never too late to become a kale eater. And when it's mixed with bacon, sausage and cream, it's got to be tasty, and hopefully not poky.

One cup of shredded kale gives 547 mcg of vitamin K, which translates to about 680 per cent of the recommended daily amount. In comparison, one cup of raw spinach gives you 145 mcg of vitamin K. Crazy. This vitamin is not commonly found in food, yet is so important to bone health, vitamin D absorption and blood clotting. And that's just one of a very, very long list of nutritional marvels of this vegetable. It's also, as you well know, very easy to grow, and indeed does not like to die in the heat, cold or drought that kills off other much more delicate greens.

Kale is, in fact, so potent that most sources recommend not eating more than two cups a week. And if you are on blood-thinning medication, it should be eaten sparingly, if at all. So settle down and don't go crazy on the stuff. Moderation, it seems, is the way to go with kale. Phew.

There are, of course, many versions of this recipe, but they all share the same basic ingredients in varying proportions. Just *don't* go easy on the garlic when you stake your take on it.

*A former caterer, Cynthia Gunn now runs a window-restoration business. She restores pre-1950s wood windows, preserving their beauty and inherently durable old-growth wood, and creating superior energy-efficiency with high-end weather-stripping. She still cooks and bakes for her family in West Quebec.*



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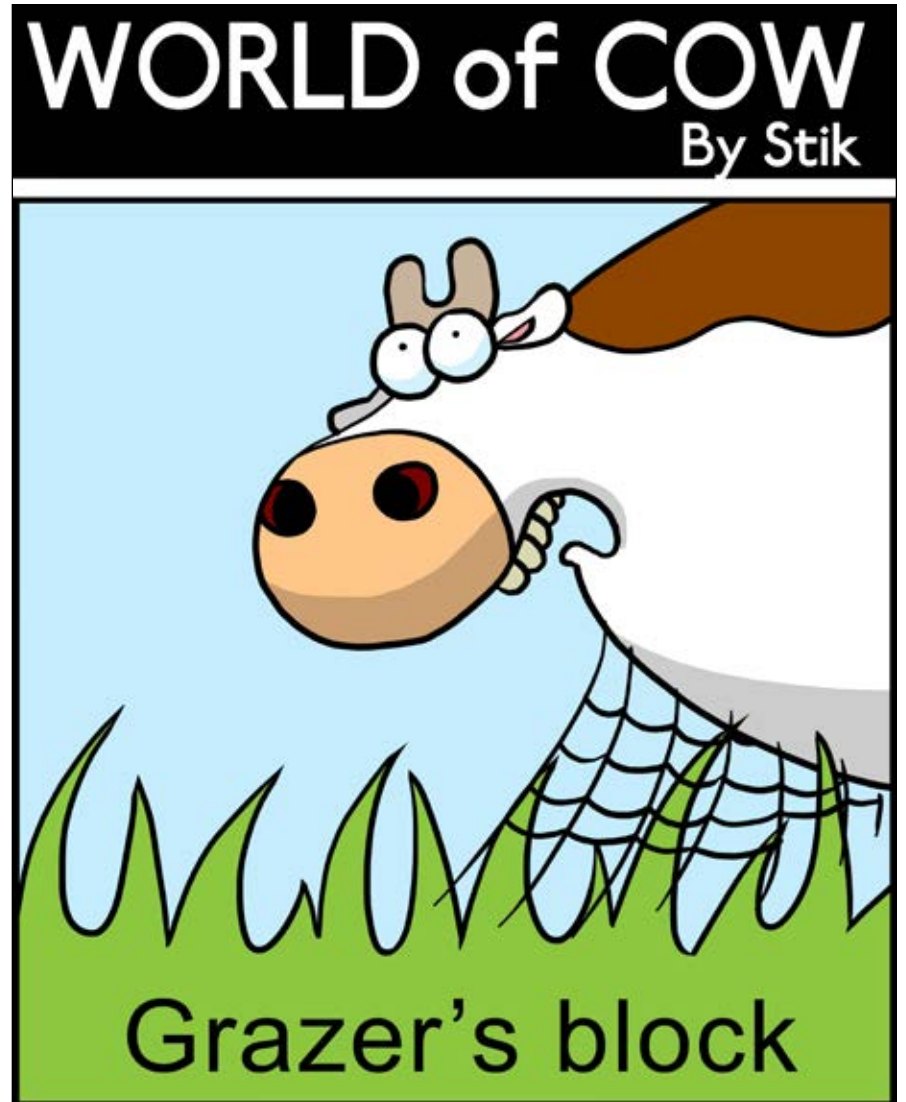
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