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# Feeling the stress



## Survey outlines high level of stress among women farmers

Women farmers in Quebec are stressed – very stressed.

They juggle work, family and more work. In fact, they perform the tasks of more than five average people in other sectors.

That is among the major finding of a new study

commissioned by the Agricultrices Québec, the organization that represents women farmers in the province.

But the headline is not anything that female farmers are surprised about.

The full story can be found on Page 5.

*“It is in everyone’s interest to ensure that the rights of English-speaking Quebecers are protected and respected, and that Quebec’s English-speaking minority is recognized as a provincial community ....”*

– Commissioner of Official Languages  
Raymond Thériault

## UPA to mark 100 years

### Milestone tells the story of farming in Quebec

**Brenda O’Farrell**  
*The Advocate*

The history of Quebec has many chapters and spans several centuries, but it is the story of the province’s farms and its farmers that will be showcased later this year as the Union des producteurs agricoles celebrates its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in Quebec City.

And that is where it all started.

It was on Oct. 2, 1924, in the provincial capital that the Union catholique des cultivateurs was formed. On that autumn day 100 years ago, this forerunner to today’s farmers’ union, the

UPA, brought together about 2,500 farmers from across Quebec. The goal of joining forces in a union was to speak to government with one voice. And what they had to say charted a course that changed the rural landscape.

The UCC demanded that the electrical grid be expanded from the cities into the outlying regions. It also advocated for income protection and educational initiatives and information resources for agricultural producers.

But the organization’s success over the decades that followed stemmed from its duality – its ability to bring not only farmers from every region



The UPA logo features the graphic image of three hands nested inside of each other, symbolizing the three components of the UPA – syndicates, federations and the confederation, as well as the hands and furrows that feed people.

of the province together, but unite the different type of farmers – and their different types of specialties, like dairy, pork, beef.

See UPA, Page 7.



# Just the facts

## 3%

The amount of the planet's renewable freshwater reserves located in Quebec, with 40 per cent of that found in the St. Lawrence basin.

Source: Quebec Environment Ministry

## \$555 million

The value of organic agricultural products exported by Canada in 2022, making the country the fifth largest organic exporter globally.

Source: Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

## 4 million

The number of acres in eastern Canada that grew oilseeds in 2023, with 70 per cent of the acreage growing soybeans.

Source: Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

## 240 million

The approximate number of animals on farms in Quebec currently.

Source: MAPAQ

## AT THE MAC MARKET



THE ADVOCATE

Fall is a busy time at the Mac Market at Macdonald Campus in Ste. Anne de Bellevue. The gardens are bursting with a wide range of vegetables – from tomatoes to eggplants, peppers to squash. All the produce is grown at the campus' horticultural centre. If you are looking for farm fresh, this is the place.



### 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.

### Shared Values

Members of the QFA believe in:

- Maintaining family-owned and operated farms / Food sovereignty and self-determination by individuals and nations / Intergenerational involvement / Lifelong learning / Protection of the physical environment / Preserving land for agricultural production / Minimum government interference / Working alone and in partnership with others

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Signature .....

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- voting privileges at the QFA Annual General Meeting

### Quebec Farmers' Association

555 boul. Roland Therrien, office 255 Longueuil, Quebec J4H 4E7

Receipts are issued upon request. Memberships are valid for 12 months from month of purchase.



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ADRIAN WYLD/CANADIAN PRESS/CBC.CA

Bloc Québécois leader Yves-François Blanchet has added Bill C-282 to his list of conditions to support the Liberals in a future confidence vote.

## Farmers add their voices urging Senate to pass C-282

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

Pressure is mounting on the Canadian Senate to provide its stamp of approval to Bill C-282, legislation that aims to protect the country's supply-managed agricultural productions like dairy, poultry and eggs.

The bill, a private member's bill first introduced by the Bloc Québécois last year, was approved by the House of Commons in June 2023. It, however, has been stalled in the upper chamber. And is now part of the political manoeuvring by the Bloc to leverage support for the minority Liberal government in Ottawa.

Bloc leader Yves-François Blanchet has given the Liberals an ultimatum, and earlier this month accused what he called the "illegitimate" upper chamber of "leading the prime minister around by the nose."

Blanchet added C-282 to his list of conditions to support the Trudeau Liberals in a future confidence vote.

Although Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said he would not interfere with the Senate's deliberations, International Trade Minister Mary Ng has sent the chairman of the Senate's foreign affairs and international trade

committee, Peter Boehm, a letter in early October.

In addition, farming groups, including members of the Union des producteurs agricoles, were on Parliament Hill earlier this month to add their voices urging the Senate to approve the bill.

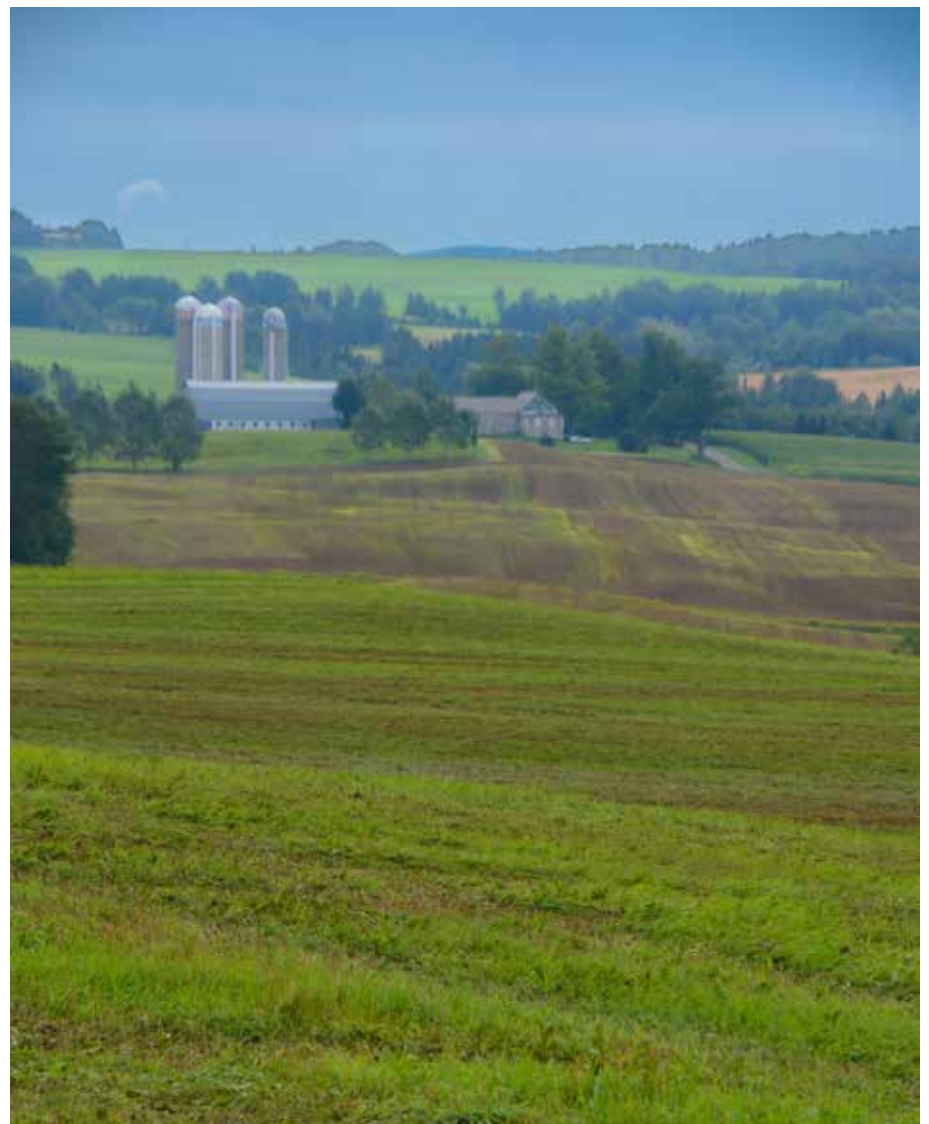
But Boehm stated publicly that hearings will continue until the end of October. That process will then be followed by a clause-by-clause study of the legislation.

Private member's bills approved by the House of Commons are not prioritized on the Senate's agenda, which, in part, explains why the process has been so slow.

Boehm has also been quoted as saying that he does not think it is in "Canada's national interest" to pass the bill because it would impact future trade negotiations.

The Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA) is scheduled for renegotiation in 2026.

Dairy, poultry and egg producers continue to argue that supply management has been sacrificed in recent trade negotiation talks and any further erosion of the protections it offers would seriously harm their livelihoods.



GILLES RIVEST/STOCK.ADOBE.COM

Overall, farmland prices saw a 5.5-per-cent average hike in Canada.

## Farmland values keep rising

Quebec leading most provinces as prices jump 5.4% in first half of 2024

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

Quebec has recorded the second highest increase in farmland values in the first six months of 2024, as prices jumped 5.4 per cent, according to figures released by Farm Credit Canada earlier this month.

It is the second year in a row that the 6-month increase in farmland prices in Quebec outpaced all provinces except Saskatchewan, where prices jumped 7.4 per cent in the first half of 2024, the data shows.

Ontario recorded the second lowest rate of increase, as prices there rose by 2.1 per, while cultivated land in Prince Edward Island edged up by only 1.7 per cent.

Rates of increase in New Brunswick, British Columbia and Alberta came in at 5.2, 5 and 4.6 per cent, respectively.

Overall, farmland prices saw a 5.5-per-cent average hike in Canada.

This small national deceleration in the growth of farmland values comes as interest rates have dropped, but at the same time farm revenues have been depressed as commodity prices have taken a hit, the FCC highlights.

"High input costs squeeze profit margins, possibly limiting farmers' capacity to invest in new land and moderating farmland growth," the FCC said in a statement issued Oct. 4.

Another factor that is a crucial driver of farmland values, the lending organization pointed to, is the limited availability of growing land for sale.

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AGRICULTRICES QUÉBEC

Valérie Fortier, a dairy producer from Saint-Valère and president of the Fédération des agricultrices du Québec, knows the type of stress women farmers are feeling. A new study reveals that female producers are carrying a very high stress load from managing multiple roles on the farm.

# Women farmers feeling the stress: survey

## Female producers carry out tasks for 5.1 positions

**Andrew McClelland**  
*The Advocate*

A new study shows that the vast majority of female farmers in Quebec – 90 per cent – suffer from high levels of stress as they struggle to balance farm tasks, family life and farm management.

“Women in agriculture hold an average of 5.1 positions in the business,” explained Valérie Fortier, president of Agricultrices Québec.

“The five main tasks are management and administration – such as strategic planning, business management, finance and accounting – tasks related to agricultural production, purchasing and supply, and human resources.”

In other words, female agricultural producers feel forced to spread themselves too thin over the many areas of farm production. The study, conducted by Léger, was carried out on behalf of the Fédération des agricultrices du Québec, a specialized federation of the Union des producteurs agricoles. The association was founded in 1987 to

highlight concerns of female producers in the province.

“The results of the survey confirm what our members have been telling us for several years,” said Fortier, herself a dairy producer from Saint-Valère in Centre-du-Québec.

“The situation is worrying and concerns all of us, considering the fundamental and structuring role that women play in the agricultural sector in Quebec.”

Province-wide, 27 per cent of farm businesses are owned or co-owned by women. While female producers have made great gains in recent decades, figures show they also bear more than their fair share of the workload, particularly when it comes to paper work and financial management.

“Managing multiple tasks is the top source of stress that respondents report experiencing on a daily basis,” Fortier said.

In fact, 63 per cent of respondents said that multi-tasking and balancing roles was a key source of mental stress.

Other sources of stress include pressure for productivity (46%), financial problems (43%), family responsibilities (41%) and weather conditions (40%).

The situation can be even more challenging for young female producers (between the ages of 18 and 34), who are often juggling the work of supervising children while also managing farm labour.

“For younger women farmers, balancing domestic and professional tasks and reconciling work and personal life are the most important challenges,” Fortier said.

“Women farmers who have children in their household reported that the main challenges are balancing domestic and professional tasks, reconciling work and personal life, and salary conditions.”

Chief among the stressors and tasks often foisted upon female farmers are what sociologists call “invisible work” – work done within the family that may include household chores and personal care, labour performed for a family business, or caregiving for the

older generation.

In November, the Les Agricultrices will launch a tool to quantify invisible work in agriculture. The data collected will be used to obtain gendered information on invisible work, to document the phenomenon and raise awareness among agricultural producers.

“Our programming at Les Agricultrices is a response to the mental stress-load issues experienced by women farmers that were identified in Léger’s study,” Fortier explained.

This year, the federation is offering members up to seven hours of free consultations with experts, including notaries, tax specialists, lawyers, agricultural management consultants, marketing-communications advisers and financial planners. Fifteen workshops on various themes along with entrepreneurial mentoring, personalized support and networking are also planned.

To find out more about what help is available from the Fédération des agricultrices du Québec, visit [tellementplus.ca](http://tellementplus.ca)



PATRICKLAUZON PHOTOGRAPHE/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Quebec farmers recognized the need to protect farmland. It is something that is lacking in many other provinces.



**John McCart**  
QFA President

Farmers have realized the benefits of banding together for a very long time now. Neighbours helping neighbours, talking over the fence, meeting for coffee, even just waving as they pass each other on the road. These are all ways of sharing common interests with growth as a positive outcome.

This year, the Union des producteurs agricoles is celebrating a remarkable 100 years.

On Oct. 2, 1924, the Union catholique des cultivateurs, the UCC, was formed out of a need to address the issues of that time, like market prices, labour shortages, farm debt and access to resources. Does it sound familiar?

In the early days, the UCC created a provincial farm credit where loans of up to \$6,000 were available at 2.5-per-cent interest. It is a goal that is still reached

## Farmers joining forces have proud, successful history

for today in the wake of high interest rates and volatile markets.

The name of the UCC was formerly changed to the UPA in 1972. Farming is the one profession that deals with Mother Nature, governments, the struggle to produce more for less, and all the while attempting to make a profit on a yearly basis.

### Best quality

During the last 100 years, farmers and farming have been brought out of the Dark Ages and into an era where consumers can go to the supermarket, or the local roadside stand, knowing that the food they reach for is absolutely the safest. The powers of the union helped bring electricity to all those in the rural area, achieving 85-per-cent coverage by 1956.

Recognizing the need to act together, the UPA has brought all the regions across the province together, with all the different specialties, including the

Quebec Farmers' Association, to form one organization where everyone, every leader, can sit down together and act with the goal of a better life for farmers, a safer and more abundant food supply for consumers and a future that can grow.

The farmers of Quebec recognized the need to protect farmland, something that is lacking in so many other provinces. The UPA's ability to work with all levels of government is a priority to ensure that the needs of the producer will be met, while respecting the environment, the welfare of animals and the need to be able to hand a farm down from one generation to the next.

### Different groups, organizations

But UPA is not the only farming organization. Many others, with histories that reach back many decades have been formed to help Quebec farms prosper.

The Coopérative fédérée de Québec, started in 1922, is one of them.

And other farming events and groups have proud histories. The Expo Lachute Fair will celebrate its 200th anniversary next year. The farmers in Argenteuil County, more than 200 years ago, decided that there was a need for the rural population to showcase its abilities to grow crops and raise livestock. Many other counties followed suit, and are still active today, hosting the single largest events in their communities.

Even our own QFA is now 67 years old and still going strong.

Although the specific needs of all these organizations may have changed slightly over time, the core values remain the same. The success of the farm now and in the future is vital to our society. With the exodus of so many from the farm over these last 100 years, farmers getting together to grow their livelihood will always be around.

# Husband and wife die on Montérégie farm after falling into manure pit

**Frederic Serre**  
*The Advocate*

A tragic accident at a family farm in the Montérégie village of Ste. Christine earlier this month resulted in the deaths of a man in his 40s and his wife, also in her 40s. The Sûreté du Québec and Quebec's Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail (CNESST) are investigating the Oct. 4 incident at the farm on Highway 116, near Acton Vale.

According to Camille Savoie of the SQ, officers and local firefighters were called to the Robidoux Jutras veal and grain farm at about 6:30 p.m. after receiving a report of a severely injured man found unconscious in a manure pit. Savoie said the victim's spouse attempted to rescue him, but she, too, was also seriously injured. The couple was pulled out of the pit by firefighters.

Éric Jutras was pronounced dead at the scene while his wife, Caroline Robidoux, was rushed to hospital. She died nine days later, on Oct. 13.

Investigators believe the accident

happened as Jutras was working near the pit. He fell into the pit after possibly suffering a medical emergency due to the toxic gas emanated from it. The SQ said Jutras called out to his wife, who rushed to his aid, but she also succumbed to the fumes and fell into the pit.

A Gofundme campaign has been launched by the family of the couple, with already more than \$19,500 raised to support their three children.

The tragedy this month is the second of its type to occur in the area. In 2016, a pig farmer and his 18-year-old employee died while trying to do some work in a manure pit at a farm in St. Valérien de Milton, located about 30 kilometres from Ste. Christine. Investigators reported that the farmer, who was in his 50s, lost consciousness due to the toxic fumes in the pit, and his employee rushed to his aid but was also overcome by the fumes. Both men died at the scene. It was determined that their deaths were the result of inhaling high levels of hydrogen sulfide.



GOFUNDME

Éric Jutras and Caroline Robidoux died nine days apart after both are believed to have been overcome by fumes and fell into a manure pit on their farm in Ste. Christine on Oct. 4. Robidoux was taken to hospital, where she was treated, but died Oct. 13. They leave three children.

## UPA: Union shaped rural Quebec over the years

From Page 1

"We protect all the models of agriculture," said UPA president Martin Caron in a recent interview. "The greatest wealth we have in Quebec is all the diversity in relation to different productions and the models of agriculture, whether large or small farms."

Creating local farmers' group was always at the core of the organization's approach.

The first of those groups was founded within the first week of the UCC's founding. It was formed in St. Nazaire d'Acton in the Montérégie area, between Drummondville and Acton Vale. The second group was established in the parish of St. Edmond de Coaticook in the Eastern Townships. By 1925, there would be 255 local groups, that included more than 11,000 farmers, about 10 per cent of the province's agricultural producers at that time.

Laurent Barré became the organization's first president. He served in that capacity from 1924 to 1926.

Barré would then run for a provincial seat in the National Assembly as a member of the Quebec Conservative

Party, winning a seat in 1931. In the 1935 election, we would run under the Union Nationale banner, winning again. He was defeated in 1939, but returned to be part of the Union Nationale government in 1944, when he was named Quebec's minister of agriculture until 1960.

In 1972, the UCC rebranded itself, becoming the UPA and the only representative of farmers in Quebec through the adoption of the *Farm Producers Act*. Caron is the 14<sup>th</sup> president of the UPA.

Throughout the 1970s and '80s, the UPA was part of a number of campaigns championing the rights of the province's farmers.

Everything from the fight against the expropriation by the federal government of vast tracts of farmland in Mirabel to build an international airport, to the creation of quota systems for the dairy, poultry and egg sectors were tackled.

In the 1990s, issues of environmental protection began to emerge, as well as global trade pacts.

In 1999, the UPA called for the creation of mechanisms to provide farmers



Newspaper headlines the creation of the UPA forerunner the Union catholiques des cultivateurs in 1924.

with insurance and financing, leading to the creation of La Financière agricole du Québec in 2001.

Today, the UPA represents more than 42,000 farmers, and the organization is at the forefront of the movement to protect agricultural land from being de-zoned for other uses.

As Caron has often cited, only two per cent of the land in Quebec is zoned for farming. That represents about a quarter of a hectare per resident, a ratio that is the lowest of all jurisdictions in America outside of Canada.

Farming in Quebec has evolved from merely a way of life to a way of life that feeds a growing portion of the



The UCC flag.

world. But it still faces a wide variety of challenges.

Those challenges will be the focus of the UPA's next chapter.

## Trends in agriculture



SENTURKSERKAN/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

A nation's culture is made up of many things – attitudes, customs, behaviour, rituals, arts and music, beliefs, religion and language.



**Chris Judd**  
*The Advocate*

# What really is culture? It's more than just language

For the last few years, our provincial government has got its nickers in a knot over the use of the English language.

So what does a nation's culture actually include?

A nation's culture is made up of attitudes, customs, behaviour, rituals, arts and music, beliefs, religion and language. Culture matters because people matter.

Some societies seem to want to divide us. But cultural differences don't have to build walls between us. Once we begin to know someone else's culture, we begin to reach out and give someone the dignity of trying to understand them better.

A longtime neighbour and best friend of mine, who grew up in a French-speaking family, once explained the significance of language to me: Language is like a car, he said. Just as some people speak French, some speak English, some speak Dutch, some speak Spanish, some people drive Fords, some drive

Chevs, some drive Toyota or Dodge. Some people are very devoted – don't tell them that your car is better than theirs. So don't tell them that they speak the wrong language.

Cars are but a means of transportation; while language is only a means of communication.

### We can adapt to be understood

On our farm, we have an excellent "temporary worker" who comes from South America. Even after working for five summers in this province, he doesn't feel comfortable speaking either English nor French, but with a cell phone app he can speak Spanish into his phone and we can listen to him in whatever language we want at the other end of the phone call.

But the other parts of what makes up a culture can be much harder (or impossible) to change.

Let's look at them.

**Attitude:** When I get up in the morning, I can decide to be happy or grumpy for the day. If I decide to be happy and meet the world with a smile, I find that

the entire day is a lot more enjoyable. Some people seem to have a problem making that decision.

**Customs:** In some countries, females are not treated as equals, while in others, a younger person is never accepted as equal to someone older.

**Behaviour:** Arrogance never gained any respect from me.

**Rituals:** These are interesting to understand, but a strong degree of acceptance by everyone is seldom.

**Arts, music, dance and songs:** These are what makes different cultures so extremely interesting and engaging. When you engage in celebrations, like St. Paddy's Day, Oktoberfest, St. Jean Baptiste Day, Mardi-gras or Canada Day, you will totally understand. When a group of older French-Canadian men get together to sing traditional old French songs, to me, that "joie de vivre" is true Quebec culture.

**Beliefs and religion:** The differences in beliefs and religions are our world's two largest reasons for conflict. In some cases, religion has prevented people from having a more comfortable life.

I am told that there are more than 4,000 religions in the world, and most of us pray that we can get to the same place when we die. But people cannot get along. What will happen when, and if, we do get to that heavenly place? How will we get along then?

### And then there is greed

It looks to me that "greed" for power and money seems like the two main reasons for conflict in our world. Often, wanna-be leaders use the divide-and-conquer method to turn one religion or language against another to get the battle started.

If I only accepted friends who had the same skin colour, had the same religion, spoke the same language, drove the same colour of car on the same side of the road, sang the same song, danced the same, ate only meat and potatoes, and voted the same way, then I would have only a very small percentage of my friends! It is a lot more fun to try to accept other people's opinions, understand and enjoy other cultural differences.

Try to explain that to our politicians.





# Young grain producer expands into custom harvesting, spraying

**Andrew McClelland**  
*The Advocate*

You could say that from an early age, Andrew Dirven had his priorities straight when it came to farming.

"One day I came home from school and saw that my family was harvesting," the 21-year-old grain producer recalls. "So I ran inside and told my father that I did all my homework on the bus – which I definitely hadn't done – just so I could ride in the tractor with my grandfather. I loved every second of sitting in that tractor, until the next morning when I actually had to do my homework on the bus!"

From that young age, Dirven realized that his third-generation family farm in Bainsville, Ont., was something special. And there weren't many other careers he considered pursuing.

"It was an amazing childhood growing up on the farm," Dirven said. "I was always fascinated with tractors and combines. And that fascination is still with me. Working alongside my family as a child developed a special bond. Being passionate farmers brought us together."

The story of the Dirvens' farm begins in 1977, when Andrew's grandparents, Peter and Betty Dirven, decided to sell their farm in The Netherlands and relocate to Canada. It wasn't long before their son, Nick, took an interest in the family business and started a multi-generational grain and cash cropping operation.

Today, the family – along with lots of help from Andrew – produces corn, soybeans and wheat under the name Spendrew Farms.

Located a mere seven kilometres from the Quebec border, it wasn't difficult for Dirven to realize that Macdonald Campus in Ste. Anne de Bellevue was a great, nearby place to receive an agriculture education.

"Mainly, I wanted to go there just because of my passion for agriculture. But after I started, I realized networking was just as important," he explained.

"Over my three years at Mac, I met a lot of people with the same interests as me, and a lot of those people have become my closest friends."

Dirven enrolled in the Farm Management and Technology (FMT) program in the fall of 2021, discovering the finer points of soil science, cash



COURTESY ANDREW DIRVEN

Andrew Dirven came back from Macdonald Campus with ideas of how to diversify his family's grain operation in Bainsville, Ont. Now, he's started custom harvesting and spraying on the side.

cropping and agricultural economics.

"Cash cropping is a very dependant industry on the markets. Our grain prices fluctuate depending on supply and demand around the world," he said. "There isn't a lot of security or guarantee to what prices we'll receive. Although our farm works hard on marketing by making futures contracts, setting targets and other marketing strategies, it still puts a lot of dependency on what's going on globally."

That's what gave Dirven the thought of diversifying. Instead of relying on grain prices to determine the revenue of Spendrew Farms, there was money to be made providing services instead of just selling commodities.

"Since 2023, we've been offering custom harvesting and custom spraying," Dirven said, referring to two tasks he

has taken on himself. "I believe in the importance of diversification, having alternative income sources to allow our farm to have more security."

With initiatives like those, Dirven is definitely working more than full time on the family farm. Along with spraying and harvesting, equipment maintenance is also his duty at Spendrew. He knows that one day, he'll be able to take over management of the whole farm – and is more than grateful for the fact that he was born into a family farm so he could pursue his dream.

"I wish for my future generation and other future members in the agriculture industry to have the same opportunities as I had," Dirven said. "Opportunities to purchase land will be the biggest challenge for young farmers. With land being an appreciating

asset, it'll continue to be more expensive for the next generation. Not only will receiving approval for a mortgage to purchase the land be a challenge, but as well as being able to cash flow the payments."

That's part of the reason that family – and family farming – play such an enormous role in Dirven's life and journey in the industry. For him, family working together is a strength that has to be experienced to be understood.

"Just growing up and watching my family work hard day and night together – to either complete harvest, or try to get the last field planted before the rain, or whatever the task might have been – it's a level of passion that most people wouldn't understand unless they lived it."



JIM CUMMING/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Looking to the future, a 2022 study estimates Quebec's agricultural sector will expand by 23 per cent by 2030.



**Martin Caron**  
UPA President

# 100 years of representing Quebec's farmers

On Oct. 1-2, 1924, within the context of a post-war economy rife with overproduction, falling prices, debt and mass exodus from rural areas, 2,500 farmers from all corners of the province met in Quebec City to found the Union catholique des cultivateurs (UCC), which became the Union des producteurs agricoles in 1972.

Many historians consider the creation of the UCC among the 30 most notable events in the history of Quebec society. Its creation forever changed the course and destiny of the province's agricultural producers and forestry workers.

United under the union's banner, producers have confronted numerous challenges, from accessing agricultural loans, bringing electricity to the country, implementing collective marketing, fighting for revenue security, and protecting agricultural land and activities. They have also tackled broader issues, like municipal

finances, agri-environmental concerns, international aid (including through the creation of UPA Développement international), and market globalization. Throughout that time, our organization has ensured that producers have had access to training, innovation opportunities, business development and services.

The collective approach of the UPA and its syndicates has greatly influenced the evolution of the industry's agri-food ecosystem. An outstanding 90 per cent of agricultural production is marketed collectively by specialized syndicates, and last year more than \$66 million was invested in promotion and publicity campaigns, \$4.5 million was allocated to support research and development activities and more than \$1.3 million was returned to communities in the form of donations.

The authors of a 2022 study exploring the growth potential of Quebec's agricultural sector, estimated it would grow by 23 per cent by 2030, note that 66 per cent of production is processed in the province. This fact, which is just one of the many factors that favour

industry growth, is proof positive that mutually advantageous and sustainable partnerships between the agricultural sector and other links in the food chain are crucial. The connections that characterize and facilitate this large food family – from field to fork – not only benefit its stakeholders but also consumers here but around the world.

The UPA has always been a reflection of its time. The last 100 years have allowed us to support and be part of important changes. For example, it has been behind the exceptional rise of the organic sector, the emergence of the local food movement and the swelling ranks of women entrepreneurs. (According to the 2021 Census of Agriculture, women comprise 27.7 per cent of owners and co-owners on Quebec farms.)

Throughout the year, the UPA has celebrated its centennial under the theme of *Du cœur au ventre depuis 100 ans*, encompassing not only the essence of the organization but also its members.

• Think of the dairy and forestry sectors, which were the first to establish

joint marketing plans.

- Think of the millions of hectares once cleared in all four corners of the province, to where we are today, dedicated to preserving and developing our forests and agricultural heritage.
- Think of the thousands of farm families tied to the land and their exceptional contributions to the vitality of rural communities.

- Think of the aspirations of the next generation and their desire to be an integral part of Quebec's society, sustainably feeding their fellow citizens.

The UPA's year-long centennial was a unique opportunity to recognize and celebrate each of these important achievements and aspirations.

The agricultural industry can be proud of our elected members and employees, who work hard every day to advance the hundreds of files in every production sector and region. For the past 100 years, producers and forestry workers have known that they collectively had the power to bring about change. I have no doubt that they will continue to do the same for the next 100 years.



**Paul J. Hetzler**  
ISA Certified Arborist

Back when I was a baby arborist, I worked for an old-timer who told me: "The best time to prune trees is when the tools are sharp."

He would also say: "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger," even though he was beset with shoulder injuries, knee problems and back pain.

While he taught me a lot of things, I later learned that both of these old saws are dangerous lies.

There are, in fact, certain times of the year when pruning should be avoided. Late spring, between bud-break and full leaf-out is a key period of pruning abstinence.

The other no-pruning interval is from the time leaves start to change colour in the fall until trees are entirely bare. There are good reasons to put away pruning tools at this time of year.

### The claw-back clause

As days get shorter, deciduous trees and shrubs start to make a waxy layer between the petiole base of each leaf and the twig to which they're attached. The wax is called suberin.

Suberin will eventually plug the vessels that moved water and nutrients into, and sugars out of, leaves all summer. This blockage protects twigs from losing water over the winter. It also leads to the breakdown of green chlorophyll molecules, thus revealing the yellow and orange pigments already present in leaves.

Before the vascular tubes are entirely blocked, though, trees "claw back" about half the nutrients from each leaf: nitrogen, potassium, iron, magnesium, manganese, and other essential elements. This recovery is quite important to the nutrient budget of woody plants.

Trees also move sugar out of the leaves. This sugar is the product of a season's worth of photosynthesis. Much of the sugar clawed back from autumn leaves before they drop is transported down to the roots, lower trunk, as well as branches, where it is stored as starch. In spring, starch is turned back to sugar and distributed to developing buds and leaves. Pruning branches in autumn, therefore, deprives trees of both nutrients and energy needed for the following year.

# Red means stop: Why autumn pruning is bad

## The illness angle

All woody plants have internal defence systems that make anti-microbial compounds to fight infections at the site of injuries, like pruning cuts. The renowned biologist and plant pathologist Dr. Alex Shigo, often called "the father of modern arboriculture," studied trees' defensive process. He called it Compartmentalization of Decay in Trees, or CODIT. This "tree-mune response" becomes active in the early spring just before bud-break and is in full swing throughout the summer, after which it starts to shut down. By the time leaves are turning, the CODIT response is much attenuated.

Therefore, wounds made in the fall are at greater risk of being infected by fungal pathogens that cause persistent, or perennial, cankers. *Nectria* and *Eutypella* are the two primary types of canker fungi, but there are more. And while spores from *Nectria* and other diseases are always present in the environment, they are most prevalent in the fall. In addition, the long rainy spells typical of autumn further raise the odds of pruning-wound infections, given that canker spores are spread by rain splash.

## The best time to prune

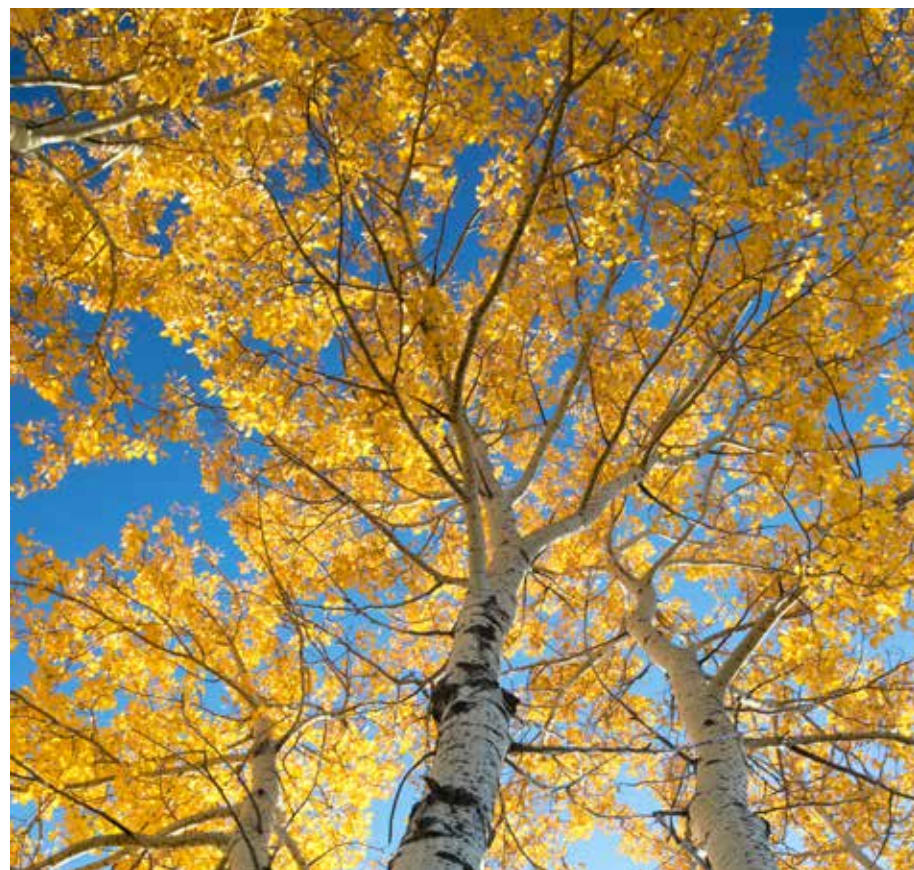
Early spring prior to bud-break is the ideal time to prune. Not only is CODIT up and running, there is little chance that pruning sites will dry out too much, which can lead to bark cracks near the wound, as can happen with early winter pruning.

The truly essential reason to stow the lopper and saw while leaves are expanding is that when trees are "busy" pushing out leaves, CODIT goes on a coffee break until full leaf-out. It's not that it turns off completely, but due to a hormonal shift in trees that happen as leaves are forming, their defenses are weakened temporarily.

## The exceptions

'I' before 'e' except after 'c' (well, except for words like "height," "seize," etc.). Exceptions can complicate things.

Obviously, some pruning may need to be done right away to address safety concerns, regardless of the season. In such cases, my one-time mentor is right: the best time to prune is when the tools are sharp. But if the goal is to boost aesthetics, or get more light on the garden, or fewer leaves in the pool, or to lessen



NICHOLAS TAFFS/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Why you shouldn't prune at this time of year: In the fall, a tree claws back much of the sugar from its leaves before they drop. This sugar is transported down to the roots, lower trunk, as well as branches, where it is stored as starch. In spring, starch is turned back to sugar and distributed to developing buds and leaves.

disease pressure in fruit trees, fall pruning should be off the table.

And then there's oak wilt, which can decimate oaks like Dutch elm disease did to elm trees. To help prevent the spread of this fearsome disease, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency recommends we not prune oaks between April 15 and July 15, when the risk of spreading oak wilt is extreme.

Depending on the year and where you live, mid-April might still be ahead of bud-break, an optimal pruning time. Some authorities suggest that to be on the safe side, we wait until Oct. 1 to prune oaks, a time that overlaps the period of colour change. Since oak wilt is far worse than perennial cankers or lost nutrients, oak-wilt prevention should always take priority over ideal pruning windows.

## Conifers count, too

Although pines and spruces only lose a small portion of their needles in the fall, the same principles hold true for them. Cutting evergreen branches in autumn will rob trees of a share of the nutrients and sugars they need.

Another reason it's best to cut conifer branches in late winter is that during July and August, a moth called the pitch-mass borer sniffs out fresh wounds to lay her eggs in. Her babies become an issue the next spring as they tunnel under the bark to feed on sap. The grubs enlarge the wound diameter, and trigger excess pitch accumulation. If you've ever noticed unsightly, oozing pitch on the trunks of pines and spruces, it's a result of summer pruning that invited pitch-mass borers to set up housekeeping. The pitch-blobs they leave behind can persist for years, diminishing a tree's aesthetic appeal.

## The moral imperative:

The last reason to stash the saw until trees are fully dormant is the danger of running into a self-righteous arborist who views fall pruning as a moral failure. They might give you the hairy eyeball, or worse yet, engage in "pruning shaming." I'm not saying that I've ever done that kind of thing.

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

# The QFA has a new website!

Quebec farming news

Events you might be interested in

Details about upcoming online Farm Forums

Information about the Quebec Farmers' Association

**IT'S ALL THERE.**

<https://quebecfarmers.org/>

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Let us know what you would like to see there.

Contact us by email: [qfa@upa.qc.ca](mailto:qfa@upa.qc.ca)

Contact us by phone: 514-246-2981





# Sustainability key in how food processors compete globally

## How it is measured is the challenge farmers face

**Christopher Bonasia**  
*The Advocate*

A framework for measuring sustainability across the agri-food industry was presented to a full room during a two-day conference earlier this month, with some questioning how small and mid-sized businesses will fare.

Panelists throughout the Canadian Agri-Food in a Sustainable World conference – hosted in Ottawa by the Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute on Oct. 2 and 3 – spoke to attendees about how standards for sustainability were shaping how Canada's food producers compete on national and global markets.

'Sustainability' is now a widely sought label among consumers. But agri-food businesses – like farmers, food processors and distributors – have struggled to assign a concrete way to measure it as they try to balance environmental stewardship against other priorities, like maintaining revenue and paying fair wages.

One way to provide clarity was put forward by David McInnes, founder of the Centre for Agri-Food Benchmarking, as he presented the National Index on Agri-Food Performance released by his organization. The index was created by a coalition of private-public partners to "present an integrated picture of sustainability for Canada's agri-food sector from food production to retail," according to the centre.

McInnes emphasized that the index should be used as a "framework to derive value" from agri-food businesses' sustainability efforts by setting standards and ways of measuring performance throughout the supply chain.

"If we don't measure ourselves, we will be measured," McInnes told attendees.

The National Index on Agri-Food Performance designates metrics for measuring sustainability across indicators in four categories: environment, economic, food integrity and societal well-being. When applied to a business, the index offers a method of measuring sustainability that doesn't fall prey to a tunnel-vision focus on any one outcome – like carbon emissions, for example – at the expense of others.

Carbon emissions are included as one



ANDRII ZASTROZHNOV/STOCK-ADOBE.COM

The National Index on Agri-Food Performance offers an integrated picture of sustainability for Canada's agri-food sector – from food production to retail. It offers a method of measuring sustainability that does not focus on any one outcome – like carbon emissions. Carbon emissions is just one environmental measure. Soil health and water stewardship are others, as well as non-environmental indicators, like food safety, financial vibrancy and resiliency, supplying decent work environments and supporting food security.

metric to measure climate performance, among other environmental indicators, like soil health and water stewardship. But businesses also need to measure up against non-environmental indicators, like food safety, "financial vibrancy and resiliency," supplying decent work environments and supporting food security.

The index has clear utility for larger businesses and corporations required to apply environmental, social and governance (ESG) targets to their practices and report their performance to investors and boards. But panelists noted that small and medium-sized enterprises are also feeling pressure to measure up to sustainability standards. Even businesses that haven't set targets may be asked to report their performance to those they sell to.

Though the index is meant to be used

by businesses of all scales, the burden of reporting is proportionally heavier for small and medium-sized businesses that may not have resources to invest in sophisticated data collection. The index's designers account for this, specifying that these smaller businesses can instead use public data to estimate their outcomes.

But Bruce Marchand, interim chair of the Canadian Sustainability Standards Board, pointed out that estimations based on out-of-date datasets could mask improvement of Canada's food producers as a whole. The sector could then benefit from public access to better data collection, perhaps from governments or industry associations.

Still, softening requirements for SMEs will not entirely offset the added strain placed on smaller businesses. The trend

of increased reporting requirements generally tends to favour larger players, and panelists acknowledged that even reporting based on the index is likely to result in consolidation of food production among ever larger businesses. Panelists emphasized that small and medium-sized enterprises need support to remain competitive, and including protection for them as an indicator of the index could provide them with an edge.

*Christopher Bonasia lives in Ottawa but was raised in the U.S. He raised sheep in Vermont and completed a master's degree in Food and Agriculture Law and Policy at Vermont Law School. He is now a staff writer for The Energy Mix and also shears sheep in the Ottawa Valley and Gatineau area.*



## QFA videoconferences

# Get in on the QFA videoconferences

Every month, the Quebec Farmers' Association hosts a videoconference on a different topic.

Get in on the conversation. Or, just listen in.

It's the place where Quebec's English-speaking farmers talk to one and other.

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Check the QFA website for details of Forums coming up this fall <https://quebecfarmers.org/>





# Prairie grazier let market come to him

Saskatchewan rancher outlines how he became an A&W beef producer

**Andrew McClelland**  
*The Advocate*

Ross MacDonald doesn't necessarily believe that success is all about business savvy and making the right decisions. For the south Saskatchewan rancher, luck and timing are factors, too.

And MacDonald will be the first one to tell you his success is a prime example of that.

"The largest single determinant in business success is timing," said MacDonald, who grazes beef cattle, a Hereford base herd crossed with Angus genetics.

"If you just sit back and wait for the timing to click, you might not recognize it. But the thing is you have to be searching, MacDonald said. "Things might not always click, but if you're not searching, you're not gonna find it."

The timing first 'clicked' for MacDonald growing up the son of lawyers in Lake Alma, Sask. – just 20 kilometres from the Montana border. Many of his parents' clients were local agricultural producers, and meeting them instilled him with a respect for ranching and grasslands.

MacDonald learned to rope and ride as a teenager and took an animal science degree at the University of Saskatchewan. Upon graduation, the research and teaching being done at Montana State University influenced him as a young grad student.

## Broadened his horizon

"In Montana, I got exposed to some very different thinking than I grew up with in terms of agricultural production systems and low-input cow systems," MacDonald explained. "It really planted a seed of creativity within me. It sort of became my goal to try and capture a piece of grass of my own."

The timing was right in the early 2000s, when grassland prices were at low-value prices in Saskatchewan. To build his land base, MacDonald was able to parlay small purchases of land with conservation easements and grazing leases with the Nature Conservancy of Canada and Ducks Unlimited Canada. Today, he grazes his herd on about 5,000 acres of prairie grassland.

"I'm pretty risk-averse when it comes to huge financial risks," MacDonald told participants of a QFA videoconference held Oct. 2. "But I'm not too risk-averse on relationships when it



COURTESY ROSS MACDONALD

Saskatchewan rancher Ross MacDonald developed his production techniques to include sustainable grass management, full traceability, and no inputs like antibiotics or growth promotants. That's when A&W started buying his beef.

comes to non-typical agricultural relationships, whether that's with conservation organizations or trying to get further up a supply chain."

## Enter A&W

Having conversations further up the supply chain is what made the timing and the luck really click in MacDonald's career. When fast-food chain A&W started its "Raised Without" program in 2013, marketing beef raised without artificial hormones or steroids, MacDonald realized that the company's commitment dovetailed nicely with his production practices.

More, he suspected that the company he was selling his cattle to – Spring Creek Ranch of Vegreville, Alta. – was one of the suppliers for A&W.

"I went to a local producers' meeting where one of the vice-presidents

of A&W was taking questions from ranchers – a lot of whom were really upset by the Raised Without program," MacDonald explained. "And I said to (the VP), 'I'm a small ranch that sells into your supply chain, I think there could be a lot more to this story of 'Raised Without'."

That encounter developed into a relationship with A&W that has lasted years. MacDonald and his wife Christine Peters began discussing their production with executives at the restaurant chain, ultimately appearing in their commercials and being featured in a series of short documentaries about Canadian ranchers.

## And it expanded from there

"During one of our conversations, they said to me, 'How do you feel about grass-fed?'" MacDonald said.

"I said: 'Well, really, that's where the logic of my production system is going, but we don't have a commercially viable market in Western Canada for grass-fed.'"

That's how MacDonald contributed to A&W's decision, in 2020, to use all grass-fed and grass-finished beef. He didn't tailor his production practices to suit their market – he was searching for opportunity and the timing just clicked.

"Each of those big events in my life has been the result of searching for it," MacDonald said as he reflected back on his trajectory in the business. "So when the opportunity arose, I was ready for it. Sure, it also came with an education, a steep learning curve, and a cost. But it has been a lot of fun, and I've learned a tremendous amount."



## Canadian Foodgrains Bank



CANADIAN FOODGRAINS BANK

Global hunger increased dramatically during the pandemic and has remained high since then, fuelled by conflict, climate and economic instability. Today, one in 11 people globally experience hunger, and more than 2.3 billion struggle to access adequate food regularly.

# Unprecedented hunger crises – they are increasing in frequency and lasting longer

**Chinelo Agom-Eze**  
Canadian Foodgrains Bank

Nowadays many humanitarian crises are lasting much longer than they used to due to the impact of prolonged conflict, recurring severe weather events and economic instability.

“I no longer have to go to the market to buy food,” said Marie Muhawenimana, a mother and wife, who lives in Rwanda in central Africa. “I can grow everything on my farm.”

Muhawenimana has transformed her life by implementing conservation agriculture and participating in her local village and loans saving group. Now that there is enough food to eat, the whole family is transformed. Muhawenimana’s children were empowered to do well in school, with her son enrolling in a master’s degree, and her two daughters planning to go to university after high school.

In Ngoma district in Rwanda, the staggering difference between yields from conventional agriculture and conservation agriculture are seen. In some cases, yields increased by 300 per cent. It is striking how families like Muhawenimana’s have achieved a level of food security that will continue to

provide for them in the years to come. This work is effective in a place like Rwanda, where a stable environment and the absence of violent conflict ensures long-term development work can thrive.

But just next door in Democratic Republic of the Congo, ongoing conflict undermines any sense of stability, and the challenges faced by partners when delivering humanitarian aid or implementing long-term strategies to improve livelihoods look very different.

Foodgrains Bank members and their partner staff implement humanitarian projects in DRC. These projects are designed to be short-term and life-saving in emergency situations, but nowadays many humanitarian crises are lasting much longer than they used to due to the impact of prolonged conflict, recurring severe weather events and economic instability. Right now, there is simply not enough funding being channelled into humanitarian assistance to meet all the needs in the world.

In DRC, ECC-MERU (the local partner of Foodgrains Bank member Mennonite Central Committee Canada) recently provided food assistance and livelihood rebuilding initiatives for

people who had been displaced by the 2021 volcanic eruption of Mount Nyiragongo, which destroyed villages, farmland and livelihoods.

As partner staff in DRC reflected on how the combination of humanitarian and development work – as well as peace-building initiatives – is necessary in their fragile context, I too reflected on how Canada can do better in this regard. Within international development circles, this multi-layered response is known as nexus programming, and is an effective way to better address the needs of people we serve.

In the words of one of the DRC partner staff: “Nexus programming is about efficiency and flexibility. It is about the progressive shift to self-sufficiency as opposed to dependency on aid.”

Global hunger increased dramatically during the pandemic and has remained high since then, fuelled by conflict, climate and economic instability. Today, one in 11 people globally experience hunger, and more than 2.3 billion struggle to access adequate food regularly. In the face of this ongoing crisis, the conversation on nexus is more important than ever. Humanitarian assistance in places like Ukraine, Gaza and Sudan, is being stretched beyond what it is

meant to do, and development funding is insufficient to fill the gaps. We need a better approach.

As Canadians, we want to see our government act as a leader in the international development space. It is essential that future programming funded by Canada includes better integration between humanitarian aid and development, as well as more flexibility between the two.

In unstable situations, this multi-faceted nexus approach is most effective in meeting immediate needs, and maximizing the impact of international development dollars for long-term recovery.

The world needs to reckon with the reality that in the face of rising and unprecedented levels of humanitarian needs, our response to crises – which are not lasting days or weeks, but months and sometimes years on end – must be more efficient, and more effective.

While humanitarian and development programming are still critical as individual pillars of international development, our approach needs to shift, and nexus is the shift we need.

*This story was originally published in The Hill Times.*



# Mental stress in agriculture is real

## Summer Green

William H. Miner Agricultural Research Institute

Before choosing a career in agriculture, one should consider the physical and mental demand it puts on your body.

After working long hours doing heavy manual labour and a significant lack of time off, many people in the agricultural industry experience varying levels of burnout. Burnout is an emotional, mental and physical reaction to constant stress.

Physical symptoms of burnout include headaches and migraines, difficulty breathing or panic attacks, digestive issues and vomiting, high blood pressure and chest pains, and sleep issues, like insomnia. Mental and emotional symptoms of burnout can show up as anxiety, anger, sadness, hopelessness, depression and/or suicidal thoughts.

## 1 in 4 Irish farmers burnt out

In a cross-sectional survey conducted by researchers from the Dublin City University on burnout and sleep issues in Irish farmers, they found that one in

four farmers are burnt out. More than 50 per cent of farmers get poor sleep, with 31 per cent only getting five to six hours a night.

Additionally, researchers found that farmers with pre-existing physical and/or mental health conditions experience 40-per-cent more burnout and sleep issues than farmers without pre-existing conditions.

Compared with the general working population, farmers experience higher overall burnout, sleep issues, cynicism and exhaustion.

## Suicide rates higher

According to studies conducted by the American Farm Bureau, suicide rates in farmers are two to five times higher than the national average.

With financial uncertainty, labour shortages, extreme weather and natural disasters, farmers have a heavy stress load. Nearly 90 per cent of farmers have financial issues and/or business problems and 87 per cent of farmers fear they will lose their farm. The rural isolation of farming and social stigma around mental health often makes it difficult for farmers



JENOCHESHUTTERSTOCK.COM

A study of farmers in Ireland showed that more than half did not get good sleep, with 31 per cent only getting five to six hours a night.

to reach out and get the help they need.

For agriculture to have a sustainable future, the well-being of farmers, ranchers and anyone in the industry is paramount. In order to do so we must continue to break the stigma surrounding mental health and become educated on the warning signs of suicide and how to help and support our peers struggling

with stress, burnout and mental health.

*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.*

# Cover crops are a win for dairy operations

## Allen Wilder

William H. Miner Agricultural Research Institute

Fall manure applications are common in the dairy industry – and for good reason. Fall weather is reasonably dry, so the fields can typically handle the traffic.

Labour is also available for field work since you don't have to worry about new seedlings or harvesting some forage at the perfect time. And then there's the fact that most of us have to drop the level of the pit before winter or else a messy winter becomes a whole new level of messy.

At the same time, fall is also kind of a bad time to be applying manure since you are giving the field a large dose of nutrients right before it sits fallow, exposed to the elements for several months. I don't care where you live or how much precipitation you get over the winter, some of those nutrients are going to escape during the off season. This is especially the case for nitrogen – which is why current Cornell recommendations consider inorganic nitrogen from fall manure to be essentially gone by springtime.

So, what's the solution?

Well, there isn't one – at least not a perfect one.

Rapid incorporation helps to prevent volatilization and surface runoff, but that still leaves a high concentration of nutrients somewhere in the upper soil profile. But what if there was a crop there to take up some of those nutrients and incorporate them into plant bio-mass that could last the winter?

That's exactly what researchers from the Northwest Crops and Soils program have been researching for the last several years in Alburgh, VT.

The study looked at silage corn plots with and without a rye cover crop receiving 6,000 gal/acre of manure in either the spring or the fall (pre-plant incorporated). This was done under both tilled and no-till conditions.

The most recent data from the 2023 growing season showed a huge yield advantage (more than seven tons per acre at 35-per-cent dry matter) for no-till plots that had a cover crop, as compared to no-till plots with fall manure alone. While no difference was detected in plots where tillage was used, there

was significantly greater soil respiration measured in the fall manure plots where the rye cover crop was present. This suggests that perhaps the large amount of cover crop biomass may have caused some nutrient tie-up, which hurt the corn as it initially degraded.

A word of caution here: While cover crops do typically increase corn yields, they can cause some problems if managed poorly. When incorporating large quantities of bio-mass before corn planting, you may need to increase the starter fertilizer rate to help the crop survive early season nutrient tie-up. However, these fields will probably require a little less late-season nitrogen, since all those stored nutrients will at some point finally become available.

I would also suggest boosting the starter fertilizer rate in no-till plantings with cover crops. It does appear that the nutrient tie-up isn't quite so bad under no-till, so this may be the winning strategy for high residue situations.

The more data I see on cover crops, the more I realize that they are a big win for the dairy industry. Whether it's emergency forage, reducing environmental



SHERYL WATSON/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Recent data shows a huge yield advantage for no-till plots that had a cover crop, as compared with no-till plots with fall manure alone.

impacts, capitalizing on carbon credits, or boosting continuous corn yields, if managed properly cover crops can do it all.

*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.*



# 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.**

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- ▶ A **10% card** to use on all purchases at **L'Equipeur (Mark's Work Warehouse)** throughout the year
- ▶ A letter explaining the benefits of being a member
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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.**

**Art Abbey**, Grenville sur le Rouge

**Douglas Beard**, St. Félix de Kingsey

**Hannah Hoare**, Grenville sur le Rouge

**Lindsay Laughren**, Arundel





# How much corn silage should be in your cows' diet?

**Jean-Philippe Laroche**

*Dairy Production Expert*

*Nutrition and Forages, Lactanet*

Producers who work with corn silage sometimes wonder about the optimal proportion of this ingredient in their diet. Answering this question is no easy task, as the effects of changing it are multiple and complex. Let's look at the facts to guide our decisions.

Before getting started, we need to clarify how we define corn silage ratios. It is the ratio of corn silage to total forage, in kilograms of dry matter (DM).

For example, a ration with 10.8 kg DM corn silage and 7.2 kg DM hay crop silage would have a ratio of 60 per cent ( $10.8 \div (10.8 + 7.2) \times 100$ ).

So what ratio should you aim for when working with corn silage?

## Impact in the barn

Each type of forage has its own advantages in the diet. Corn silage provides stability over time in terms of nutritional value, as well as low-cost energy. Perennial forages are mainly used to provide an affordable source of degradable protein, as well as physically effective fiber to help optimize rumen health.

To what degree can the proportion of these different forages influence cow performance?

A study conducted by the Miner Institute in New York State has

attempted to answer this question: the researchers compared five rations containing high-quality alfalfa hay and corn silage. The proportion of corn silage varied from 10 to 90 per cent (Table 1) between rations.

The ratio of corn silage had no significant impact on intake, energy-corrected milk production, percentage of components or kilograms of fat produced. On the other hand, true protein production was optimized at a ratio of 70 per cent. One theory is that with this ratio, degradable alfalfa proteins better complemented the fermentable corn starch, and this optimized rumen microbial protein production. It was also at this ratio that the lowest milk urea level was observed, supporting the hypothesis of better nitrogen utilization in the rumen. The proportion of de novo fatty acids was higher with a ratio between 50- and 7-per-cent corn silage, indicating that rumen health was better between these two ratios.

The conclusion is that cows can perform well regardless of the corn silage ratio. However, rumen health and animal performance seem to be optimized when the corn silage ratio is between 50 and 70 per cent.

Several other studies have also explored this question. When we combine the results of all these studies, we can conclude that, in general, animal performance is often optimized when

extremes are avoided, and when the ratio is around 50 per cent (plus or minus 25 per cent).

Of course, the ratio chosen will affect the desired type of forage mix, as well as the importance of crop quality. A higher corn silage ratio requires a higher protein forage and, therefore, a legume-based mixture. Conversely, when the forage mix occupies a larger place in the ration, a higher proportion of grasses is preferred, and the quality of the harvested material becomes even more important.

However, the answer to the initial question must go beyond nutritional impacts. A dairy farm isn't just a barn, it's also crops.

## Impact in the field

In the field, too, each type of forage has its own advantages for the farm. With corn silage, you benefit from high yields and simpler harvesting. Perennial forage plants have a positive impact on soil health, and the yield of the following crop, all while reducing the amount of nitrogen required.

However, to take full advantage of the agronomic benefits associated with hay crops, it must be given a place of choice in the rotation. Ultimately, it's the proportion of corn silage in the ration and the yields that will determine the field rotation used on the farm.

Using the yields and hectares

available on the average farm, we can quickly conclude that with a corn silage ratio of 70 per cent or more, it becomes very difficult to have an optimal rotation, i.e. one that doesn't include two years or more in a row of corn on the same plot. Second-year corn is much more expensive to produce than corn following hay crops or soybeans, due to the impact on yield and the amount of added nitrogen required (Table 2).

In this study carried out in Wisconsin, researchers evaluated the effect of 30 years of rotation on the yield of grain corn receiving different nitrogen inputs.

For second-year corn in a rotation, including three years of alfalfa (rotation 2), an added nitrogen dose of 224 kg/ha was required to achieve a yield of around 10 t/ha.

For corn following soybeans in a rotation, including two years of alfalfa (rotation 3), even though the added nitrogen dose was cut in half, the yield was close to 10 t/ha.

And for corn on a three-year alfalfa return, even though no added nitrogen was applied, a yield of 10 t/ha was obtained. A dose of 112 kg/ha of nitrogen fertilizer enabled an additional 1 t/ha of yield to be achieved. We can easily imagine that the result would be similar for corn silage yields. On a farm scale, imagine the impact this could have on the bottom line.

It also has an impact on diseases.

It's well known that successive corn cultivation is one of the main factors behind the presence of corn ear rot, the disease most responsible for mycotoxin problems. This can have a major impact on animal performance, as well as on feed costs. Optimal crop rotation drastically reduces the risk of these problems.

## Which ratio to choose?

Considering all of the above, what is the optimal ratio?

The reality is that the answer varies from farm to farm, depending on many factors. It's up to you to analyze the pros and cons of your situation.

Keeping track of your feed costs, your margin-over-feed costs and herd component production in the barn is just one place to start. Once you determine where your herd's optimal ratio lies for you, adjusting your crop rotations appropriately is the next step, if possible. Your herd advisers are also a great resource. Consider reviewing your data with your nutritionist and crop adviser the next time they visit to set your herd on the path to optimal profitability and health.

**Table 1. Impact of corn silage:alfalfa ratio on animal performance**

	Corn silage:alfalfa ratio on a dry matter basis				
	10:90	30:70	50:50	70:30	90:10
Total intake (kg DM/day)	26.4	26.8	26.7	26.6	26.3
Energy-corrected milk (kg/day)	48.3	47.0	48.2	48.7	47.9
Fat (%)	4.22	4.01	4.02	4.06	4.08
Fat (kg/day)	1.83	1.75	1.79	1.82	1.80
True protein (%)	3.05	3.02	3.01	3.07	3.01
True protein (kg/day)*	1.33	1.31	1.35	<b>1.37</b>	1.33
MUN (mg/dL)*	12.0	11.0	10.4	<b>8.5</b>	9.8
de novo Fatty Acids (g/100g FA)*	25.58	25.22	<b>25.82</b>	<b>25.86</b>	24.76

\* Significant effect. Adapted from Grant et al., 2022.

**Table 2. Impact of added nitrogen on grain corn yields\* (imperial tons grain/ha) after a rotation period of 30 years**

#	Sequence of rotations	Added nitrogen (kg/ha)			
		0	56	112	224
1	Corn monoculture	2.9	5.8	6.9	7.4
2	Corn – corn – oats and alfalfa – alfalfa – alfalfa	6.1	7.6	7.4	10.1
3	Corn – soy – corn – oats and alfalfa – alfalfa	6.7	7.7	9.9	10.2
4	Corn – corn – oats and alfalfa – alfalfa – alfalfa	10.0	10.5	11.0	11.1

\* The underlined corn represents the year of rotation where yield was evaluated. Adapted from Stanger et Lauer, 2008.

# Not all armed conflicts affect world grain prices

**Ramzy Yelda**

Senior Market Analyst

Producteurs de grains du Québec

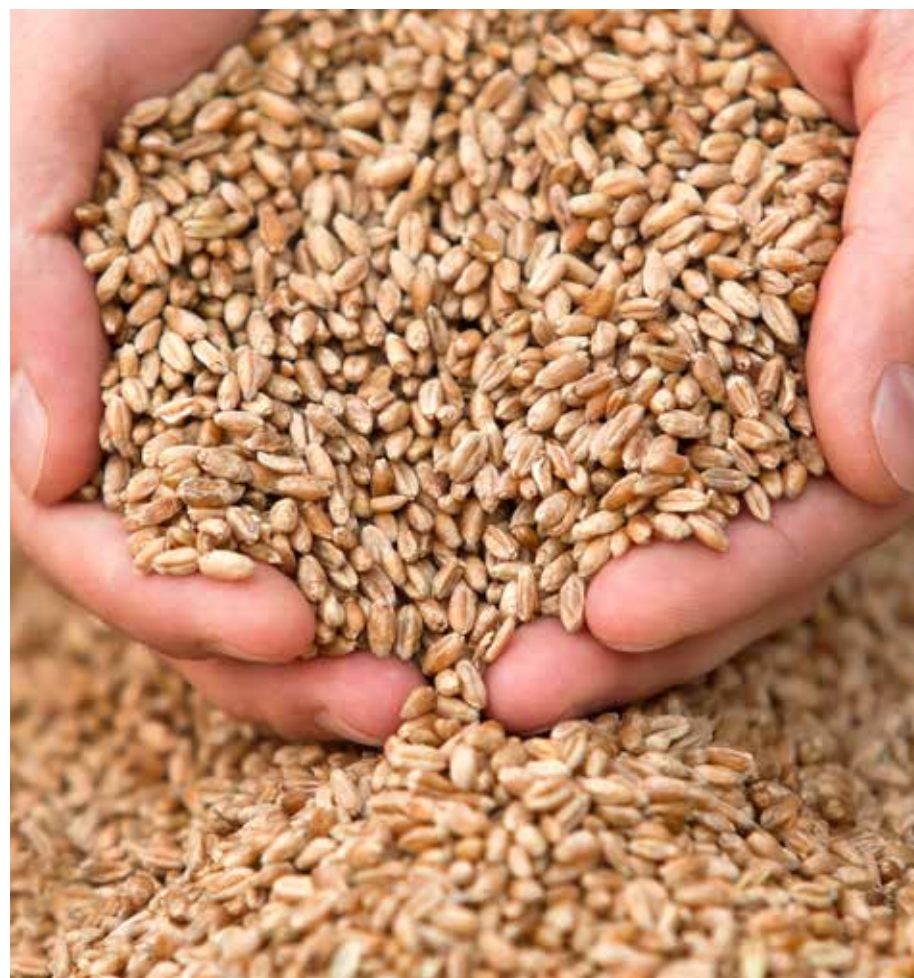
While armed conflicts have gripped the Middle East for more than a year, grain prices have been unaffected by it, unlike the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine that sparked a huge price rally. Several producers wonder why geopolitics was a determining factor in one case and not in the other.

Grains markets are impacted by geopolitics only if supply and demand are affected. With the war in Ukraine, both countries were very large exporters of wheat and corn. The market feared an interruption of exports from both countries, which would have caused a sharp drop in the world grain supply. This scenario, which was very plausible, did not take place, however. Russian exports continued unabated, while Ukraine's

grain sales dropped, but then resumed.

With regard to the Middle East conflict, the main countries concerned – Israel, Iran and Lebanon – are grain importers. However, their combined imports amount to a very small percentage of world grain demand. As far as the market is concerned, if these imports declined or even stopped because of the war, there would be no worldwide impact.

Still, this war had some collateral damage. Yemen's Houthis have attacked vessels going through the Suez Canal. The market adapted: some vessels no longer take this shortcut and now sail around Africa, hence longer navigation time and higher costs on some routes. As for those still going through the canal, insurance premiums have risen. The cost and freight price on grain imports has increased by a few dollars for some destinations.



## Advance Payments Program – after-harvest component

The “after-harvest” component of the Advance Payments Program is now up and running in AppGrains. The mobile app automatically proposes the steps to follow depending on whether you participated in the “seeding” component.

Did you already receive an advance payment under the “seeding” component? If so, you need to finalize your file by filling out your “after-harvest” report stating how much you harvested. At that point, you can apply for a supplementary advance if your inventory allows for it.

Didn't apply for payment at the time of the “seeding” component? You can apply now for an “after-harvest” advance of up to \$1 million. The first \$250,000 is interest-free.

The deadline to apply is Dec. 31, 2024.

For further information (in French):

<https://pgq.ca/producteurs/programme-de-paiements-anticipes>

## Natural gas price hikes impact agriculture industry

In a recent interview on Radio-Canada, PGQ president Christian Overbeek voiced farmers' concerns about the price hikes for natural gas recently announced by Énergir. He stated how important natural gas is to the grain-drying process and criticized the competitive disadvantage Quebec producers face, given that no such hikes are taking place abroad.

According to Énergir, the rate adjustment is necessary to reflect market costs for the product. However, the move raises concerns about what kind of impact this will have on the agriculture industry.

## Where can I buy Jean de passion beer?

Jean de passion – an exclusive beer developed to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Producteurs de grains du Québec (PGQ) – is now available to the public.

We are pleased to bring you a list of locations where you can buy our 100-per-cent Quebec beer.

Pick up your Jean de passion beer at any of the following stores:

- 1. Station des Bières et Fromagerie Sainte-Julie**  
310 rue de Murano, Sainte-Julie, J3E 0C6 QC
  - 2. IGA Marché S. Albert**  
465 rue Bethany, Lachute, J8H 4H3 QC
  - 3. IGA Extra Bromont (IGA Famille Patry)**  
101-82 boulevard de Bromont, Bromont J2L 2K3 QC
  - 4. Metro Élite St-Jérôme inc. #722**  
430 boulevard Monseigneur-Dubois, Saint-Jérôme J7Y 3L8 QC
  - 5. Fromagerie Roy inc.**  
3585 rue Queen, Rawdon, J0K 1S0 QC
  - 6. Dépanneur GV St-Jean-Chrystome**  
1083 avenue Taniata, Lévis, G6Z 2E7 QC
  - 7. Pasquier S.E.C**  
87-A boulevard Saint-Luc, Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, J2W1E2 QC
  - 8. IGA Laplante**  
420 2<sup>e</sup> Avenue, Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, J2X 2B8 QC
  - 9. L'Épicerie du coin**  
106 rue Oliver, Cowansville, J2K 1H8 QC
- You can also still buy directly from Domaine Berthiaume.  
<https://pgq.ca/notre-histoire/50-ans-au-service-des-producteurs-de-grains/points-de-vente-jean-de-passion>



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.





## Banana Bread



CYNTHIA GUNN, THE ADVOCATE

Whether you make your banana bread in loaves or muffins, finding the right mix of bananas to liquid to maximize flavour without sogginess takes a little experimenting.

### INGREDIENTS

**650g (1½ lbs) very ripe bananas (4-6 depending on size)**  
**2/3 cup sugar**  
**2 eggs**  
**1/3 cup buttermilk**  
**½ cup butter, melted**  
**2 cups flour**  
**1½ tsp baking soda**  
**1½ tsp baking powder**  
**¼ tsp salt**  
**chocolate chips (optional)**

### PREPARATION

Beat together the sugar and bananas.

Add eggs and beat, then the butter.

Sift together the dry ingredients. Add half and mix just until combined.

Add buttermilk and mix very gently, then the rest of the flour mixture, again mixing only enough to combine ingredients.

Pour batter into a loaf pan (you may line with parchment paper) or muffin tins, or a bit of both, if your pan is small and you have a mini muffin pan. Kids love the little muffins.

Bake at 375° F for 55-65 minutes if using a loaf pan. If you prefer to make muffins, they will take anywhere from 18-26 minutes, depending on size. In either case, check with a toothpick before the time is up. Every oven is different. Neither soggy or overcooked treats are good accompaniments to your cup of tea.

## Knowing a little about chemistry makes for more versatile baking

**Cynthia Gunn**

*QFA's Food Writer*

It's been awhile since we discussed kitchen chemistry. Baking works better under an umbrella of familiarity with the basics: Baking soda versus baking powder, air and acid.

When we were kids, we drew a huge Periodic Table of the Elements on the basement wall, replete with all the correct symbols, number of atoms (neutrons?) weights and even drawings where appropriate – a light bulb for tungsten, a balloon, of course, for helium. It was just for a bit of fun. I guess this makes it pretty obvious we didn't grow up on a farm where there were more fun things like barns to play in.

On a recent visit to Montreal, I noticed on my daughter's dorm roommate's wall a Periodic Table of the Elements. This chart may be more appropriate and less geeky for a science major to indulge in than an 11-year-old kid, but it lacked the home-made charm of our chart with light bulbs and red balloons and gold rings.

Nonetheless, it reminded me that chemical compounds and physics and mathematics are around us and part of our world and worklife all the time, whether we think about it or not. Case in point: Baking soda may not be an essential element, per se, but is a pretty nifty looking chemical compound made up of the essential building blocks of elements  $\text{NaHCO}_3$ .

Can you deviate from the recipe and make banana bread with one egg instead of two (the skunk was literally sleeping in the chicken coop) and three bananas instead of five? If you understand what's going on, you have freedom of modification.

In this banana bread recipe, I tried about eight different variations of amounts of banana versus liquid to achieve maximum banana flavour without sogginess. I managed to do this by decreasing the buttermilk to the bare minimum, utilizing the liquid in the bananas for most of the moisture requirements. Very ripe bananas also have more flavour versus moisture than just plain ripe bananas.

A number of years ago I wrote about a flat crackly topped cookie developed by America's Test Kitchen. They took applied science to baking with gusto, trying out 50 different variations and permutations.

What I learned then was that our two most common types of leavening agents – baking soda and baking powder – can work in tandem and, in this case, created the desired result of a flatter cookies with a crinkly top.

Baking powder produces most of its gas after the cookies go into the oven, where the dough sets before these bubbles can burst. I quote:

"But too much lift can mean cookies that turn out humped. Here's where baking soda comes in.... Baking soda raises the pH of dough, weakening gluten. Weaker gluten means less structure and cookies that spread. As for crackly tops, baking soda reacts immediately in the wet dough to produce large bubbles of carbon dioxide that can't all be contained by the weakened dough. Before the cookies can set in the oven, the bubbles rise to the top and burst, leaving fissures in their wake."

Baking powder also contains baking soda, so my own surmising concludes that it is part of what's going on here as regards raising the pH. This also explains why you do not want to put too much leavening agent in your baking – the result could be the opposite of the desired airiness.

Baking soda requires acid to create the chemical reaction. Hence, the buttermilk. Often baking powder is used as a back-up in a recipe. Let's say, in case you used plain milk. Baking powder is simply baking soda + an acid + a buffer, such as cornstarch, to prevent the reaction from occurring prematurely. Saying that, this banana bread recipe should work just using baking soda if you make sure to use buttermilk – that's the next experiment.

By the way, the answer is yes, it just won't be as flavourful, so you may add a teaspoon of vanilla.

*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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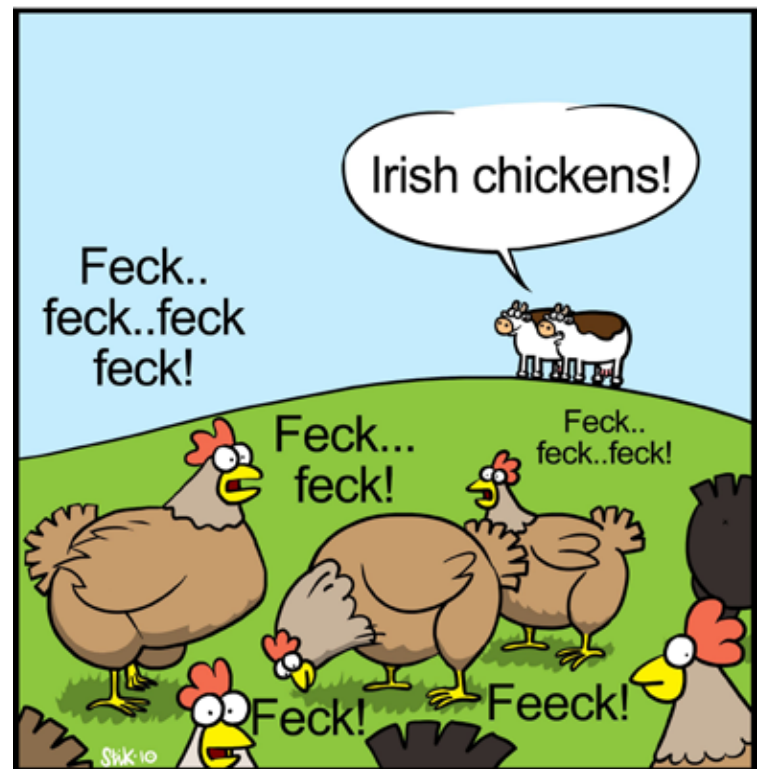
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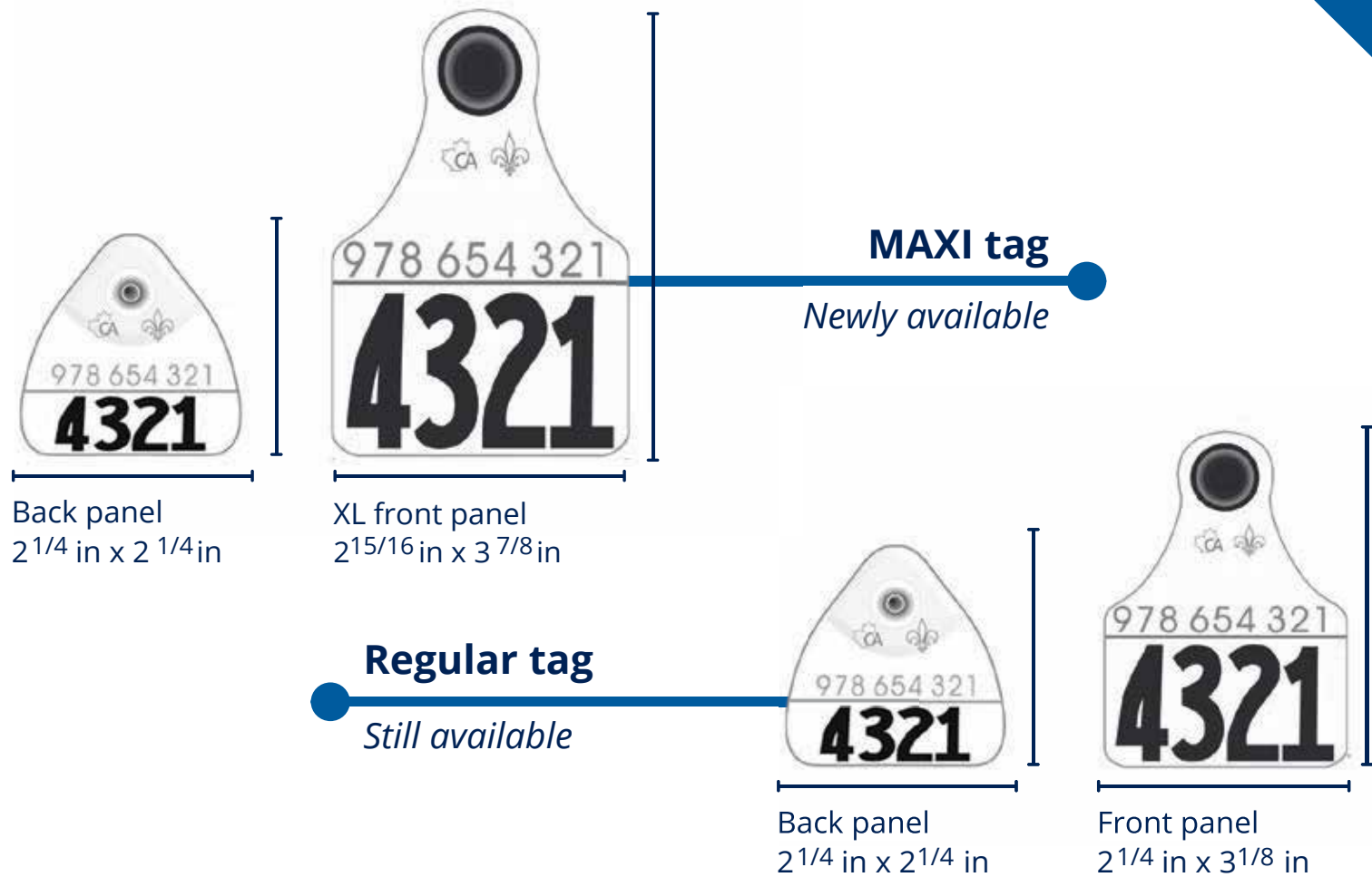
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