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"No ice on most of the Great Lakes. That's remarkable."

— Dr. Andrew Pershing, vice-president for science for Climate Central, an independent research group based in New Jersey that conducted an analysis that looked at the unusual mild winter in several areas of North America, Europe and Asia

QFA VIDEOCONFERENCES

Wednesday, April 24
at 7:30 p.m.

See more on page 24



Beef producers Francis Rodrigue and Isabelle Bolduc were named winners in the category of "New Farm Enterprise" at the Sollio Next Generation Awards for their intensive pasture management operation in Beauceville.

Quebec farms honoured for succession plans, viability

Andrew McClelland
The Advocate

Four Quebec farm businesses were recognized for their long-term viability and entrepreneurship last month, as the winners of the Sollio Next Generation Award were announced at a gala in Montreal recently.

Beef producers Francis Rodrigue and Isabelle Bolduc were named winners in the category of "New Farm Enterprise" for their intensive pasture management operation in Beauceville, about 50 kilometres east of Thetford Mines.

The couple began farming in 2015 and today operate a 125-head cow-calf business that delivers direct to consumers, to local supermarkets and keeps its cows on pasture for as long as possible.

Runners-up in the New Farm Enterprise category is Ferme Aviparc in Manseau in the Centre-du-Québec region. There, Félix Pépin et Éliane Dionne have parlayed a start-up assistance program from the Fédération des producteurs d'oeufs du Québec granted in 2015 into thriving business with 16,000 laying hens.

See FARMS HONOURED, Page 11.

Farmland prices rose faster in 2023 in Quebec than national average

Brenda O'Farrell
The Advocate

The value of farmland across the country continues to rise year over year, with increases seen in just about all provinces, including Quebec, where prices rose faster than the national average.

In fact, Quebec saw the average price of an acre of agricultural land rise by 13.3 per cent in 2023, well above the national average of 11.5 per cent. It was the second highest rate of increase in the country, just behind Saskatchewan, according to data released by Farm Credit Canada earlier this month.

"The land market has shown to be very resilient," the FCC's chief economist J.P. Gervais said in a media briefing.

"Purchasing land in the year ahead will come with careful consideration of the price timing," Gervais added in a statement. "Some operations will prefer to wait and see where land values will settle, while others may move more quickly should adjacent land become available or simply because it fits their strategic business plan."

Overall, there were fewer farmland transactions in 2023 compared with the previous year, the FCC reports "as farm operations exercised more caution towards investment decisions."

"The expectation of weaker farm revenues and elevated borrowing costs and input prices are expected to stretch out this cautious environment for farmland transactions into 2024," Gervais predicted.

The FCC's latest report marks the 40th year the agricultural agency has produced an analysis of farmland values.

Gervais acknowledged that ever-increasing prices of land adds to the growing challenges for young producers as well as for producers looking to expand their land base.

"The good news is that farmland value increases reflect a positive outlook for the demand of agriculture commodities and the quality food we produce in Canada," Gervais said. "Producers have a long track record of making strategic investments in land. These long-term investments in food production have spurred growth and create a bright future for Canada's agriculture and food industry."

For an overview of farmland price increases, see pages 4 and 5. For a look at long-range gains in farmland values and the most expensive farmland in Canada, see pages 6 and 7.



Just the facts

850

The number of licensed wineries in Canada. Most operate in British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia.

Source: Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

9,176

The number of cattle – excluding dairy cows – on Canadian farms with cattle operations in January 2024. The number of cattle in the country fell to the lowest point since 1989.

Sources: Statistics Canada and The Globe and Mail

100%

The number of students studying in post-secondary programs focused on agriculture, forestry and fishing in the United

Kingdom who said they don't think their future careers are at risk of Artificial Intelligence replacement despite the fact that AI in the agriculture market is also expected to reach over \$11.96 billion by 2032.

Despite the fact that more and more farms are investing in ag-tech year over year, it is mostly used for tasks such as data collection, security and soil and water management rather than a replacement of roles.

Source: The Knowledge Academy, a global provider of online training courses

9th

This past February was the hottest February on record in the world as a whole, making it the ninth consecutive month of record temperatures.

Source: Copernicus, the European Union's climate monitoring organization

THE LAUNCH OF SPRING



MADELEINE LANGLOIS, THE ADVOCATE

Recent snow in some parts of the province halted the fast march to spring that started in February. These cows were enjoying the warmer temps in the Vaudreuil area, west of Montreal, but still had to contend with snow. That will soon all change, though.



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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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.



Quebec Farmers' Advocate
Published to benefit the English-speaking agricultural and rural community in Quebec

Vol. 44, No. 3: 2024

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Legal deposit: National Library of Canada
Dépôt légal: Bibliothèque nationale du Québec
ISSN#0714-9518
Publication Mail No: 40033773

THE QUEBEC FARMERS' ASSOCIATION GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES THE SUPPORT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CANADIAN HERITAGE IN THE PUBLICATION OF THIS PAPER.

Editor-in-Chief Brenda O'Farrell / qfa@upa.qc.ca Graphic Design and Production Zoé Lindsay Sales Director Charles Couture / ccouture@laterre.ca / 450-679-8483 ext. 7290
Sales Representatives Sylvain Joubert, Marc Mancini

QFA memberships, which include a free subscription to the Advocate, are \$68.99 (\$60 + \$3 GST + \$5.99 QST) for one year OR \$137.97 (\$120 + \$6 GST + \$11.97 QST) for two years.
Send cheques to: The Quebec Farmers' Association / 555 Roland-Therrien, Suite 255, Longueuil, QC J4H 4E7 / Phone: 450-679-0540, ext. 8536 / Fax: 450-463-5291
E-mail: qfa@upa.qc.ca / quebecfarmers.org



UPA expresses disappointment, frustration in latest budget from CAQ government

Brenda O'Farrell
The Advocate

Despite urgent pleas, detailed suggestions and a demonstration in the streets of Quebec City to the National Assembly last December urging the provincial government to act decisively to increase its support for the agricultural sector, the Coalition Avenir Québec government failed to deliver in its latest budget earlier this month, according to the Union des producteurs agricoles.

"Overall, the 2024-2025 budget is disappointing and frustrating for the agricultural sector," read a statement issued by the UPA immediately following the tabling of the \$134.5-billion provincial budget on March 12.

"There is an urgency to act. However, no measures are planned in the budget to help the thousands of agricultural businesses whose income has collapsed following the increase in the cost of inputs and interest rates," the UPA stated.

And with the farmers' union's disappointment came a warning from UPA president Martin Caron:

"The government authorities concerned would be wrong to underestimate this discontent."

"The government of Quebec has shown leadership in recent years in terms of food autonomy, sustainable agriculture and payment for agri-environmental practices. It must now intervene in an equally inspired manner in the face of growing corporate debt,

the ineffectiveness of risk management programs, insufficient support for succession, the escalation of the regulatory and administrative burden," Caron continued.

The funds allotted to the provincial agriculture department will rise only slightly to \$1.251 billion for the 2024-2025 fiscal year, compared with \$1.208 billion in 2023-2024, which represents an increase of \$42.7 million. The MAPAQ allocation, despite the increase, still represents less than 1 per cent of the province's overall budget.

But there were a few new measures in the budget for the agricultural sector. They include:

- \$50 million for the creation of a new investment fund aimed at facilitating access to land ownership for young

producers. This initiative replaces the Fonds d'investissement pour la relève agricole.

- \$57.5 million over five years for the extension of the Programme d'appui au positionnement des alcools Québécois.
- \$50 million over five years to enhance the Sustainable Growth Investment Program (Programme Investissement Croissance Durable) managed by the Financière Agricole du Québec.

The UPA called on the government to prioritize the creation of a program to allow farmers to consolidate loans and permit them to repay them over a long period at a lower interest rate to help alleviate the financial precariousness of thousands of businesses in the sector in the short term.

Quebec spends \$38 million to acquire Rabaska lands in Lévis

109 hectares to return to agricultural use

Brenda O'Farrell
The Advocate

The Quebec government last month announced it will spend \$38 million to acquire 270 hectares of land in Lévis from a consortium that had acquired the area across the river from Quebec City more than a decade ago with plans to build a \$860-million liquid natural gas terminal along the St. Lawrence River that was abandoned in 2011.

As part of the plan to buy the land, Quebec announced 109 hectares will be returned to agricultural use.

"The transaction means that the area that will be protected will be increased to 109 hectares and which, by decree, will be reintroduced into an agricultural zone," said provincial Agriculture Minister André Lamontagne. "This is going to be a first."

"We found a very good balance between a future industrial project and the continuation of agricultural production," said Bernard Drainville, Quebec's Education minister who is also responsible for the Chaudière-Appalaches region that includes Lévis.

The roughly 160 hectares that will not be returned to the agricultural zone acquired by the province could still be the site of an industrial project, including a deep-water port, said Quebec Economy

Minister Pierre Fitzgibbon when the purchase was announced last month.

In the early 2000s, an international consortium of energy companies known as Rabaska proposed building a liquified natural gas terminal at the site in Lévis that included a deep-water port and the construction of two 15-storey storage tanks, investing \$8 million to acquire the 270-hectare tract of land. According to the plan, the consortium would import liquid natural gas by ship to the terminal and convert it back into gas to meet the growing energy needs in Quebec and Ontario.

The project was stalled in 2009, however, when Russian gas supplier Gazprom pulled out of the project, citing a drop in natural gas prices.

In 2011, the then-Liberal government, faced with mounting opposition to the project, soured on the plan, saying it would focus on building its own natural gas industry instead of importing fuel from overseas.

Last month, Drainville reiterated that the tract of land along the river has "significant economic potential," adding: "We will see what projects can be developed on these lands."

"I believe that we found a very good balance between a future industrial project and the continuation of agricultural production," Drainville said, hinting that



VILLE DE LÉVIS

future uses could include naval activities and possible battery industry links.

"Part of the territory will be zoned industrial, near deep water, a wharf could be built there," said Fitzgibbon.

Fitzgibbon said any future project will probably be related to energy, adding the government will work with Hydro-Québec and would consider extending a transmission line on the site.

Since 2013, the Union des producteurs agricoles has been pushing for all 270 hectares of land at the site be returned to the agricultural zone. It, along with its Chaudière-Appalaches federation greeted the government's announcement last month as good news. But they remained cautious.

"There remains a lot of work to be done to guarantee the agricultural use of the land in the long term, even in perpetuity," said UPA president Martin Caron.

"I will only sleep peacefully when

these lands are protected by a trust," said James Allen, president of the Chaudière-Appalaches federation. "That cultivated land is mainly located in the north and risks quickly being locked in between the river and the industrial projects that will develop in the south."

Legal action is still pending focused on challenging the government's unilaterally removal of the land from the protection of the Commission de protection du territoire agricole du Québec.

In a statement issued last month, the farmers' union said: "For the UPA, it is clear that lessons can be learned from this long saga which should not have happened, particularly with regard to the unilateral circumvention of the powers of the CPTAQ."

The CPTAQ was to issue a ruling on the UPA's motions to return all the land to the agricultural zone last month. That decision has been pushed to later in March.

Special Report



Quebec farmland values jump 13.3% in 2023: FCC

Rate of increase in province greater than national average

Brenda O'Farrell
The Advocate

The value of agricultural land in Canada continued its steady march upward again last year, with Quebec seeing accelerating double-digit increases outpacing the national average.

The value of farmland in Quebec jumped by an average of 13.3 per cent in 2023, according to the latest figures compiled by Farm Credit Canada, well above the national average of 11.5 per cent. The rate of increase in Quebec was the second highest in the country, behind only Saskatchewan, where prices increased by 15.7 per cent.

Overall, the upward trend in farmland values across the country continues to set new highs, but the national rate of increase seen in 2023 dipped slightly from 2022, when land values jumped by 12.8 per cent. The 11.5-per-cent national average increase in 2023 is the second largest year-over-year jump since 2014.

"Farmland prices have continued to increase at a rapid pace over the last couple of years, even when economic conditions suggested the growth should slow," said J.P. Gervais, the FCC's chief economist. "A limited supply of available farmland combined with a robust demand from farm operations is driving that growth."

In Quebec, farmland values have seen consistent year-over-year increases for the last 38 years, with the most pronounced hikes recorded from 2011 to 2015. Last year's 13.3-per-cent hike comes on the heels of a 11-per-cent jump in 2022, a 10-per-cent hike in 2021 and a 7.3-per-cent increase in 2020.

Quebec outpaced Ontario

Part of the reason prices in Quebec rose faster than those in Ontario, Gervais explained, could be found

in the disparity of farm revenues in the country's biggest provinces. Farm receipts in Ontario, he said, dropped about 15 per cent in 2023, while they increased by about 2.5 per cent in Quebec.

This modest increase in farm revenues in Quebec, Gervais said, "has been able to sustain the demand" for land.

Looking across the province, the Saguenay-Lac St. Jean region in north-central Quebec reported the biggest increase in cultivated farmland values, as selling prices recorded last year saw a 24-per-cent jump, a significant increase compared with the 14-per-cent hike seen in that region in 2022. It is important to note, however, that despite the higher percentage increases posted, this region has some of the least expensive land in the province.

The Chaudière-Appalaches region saw the second largest spike in farmland prices last year, as the values there jumped 22.7 per cent.

The FCC highlighted that "important market sales" occurred in both the Saguenay-Lac St. Jean and Chaudière-Appalaches regions last year, "driving up prices and market activity with a diverse set of buyers, many of whom were cash crop and supply-managed producers."

In the Montérégie region, where the highest prices for farmland in the province continue to be recorded, the value of land jumped 12 per cent last year on average, with the average price hitting \$22,100 per acre, according to transaction data compiled by FCC. Sales prices ranged from \$12,900 to \$29,300 per acre.

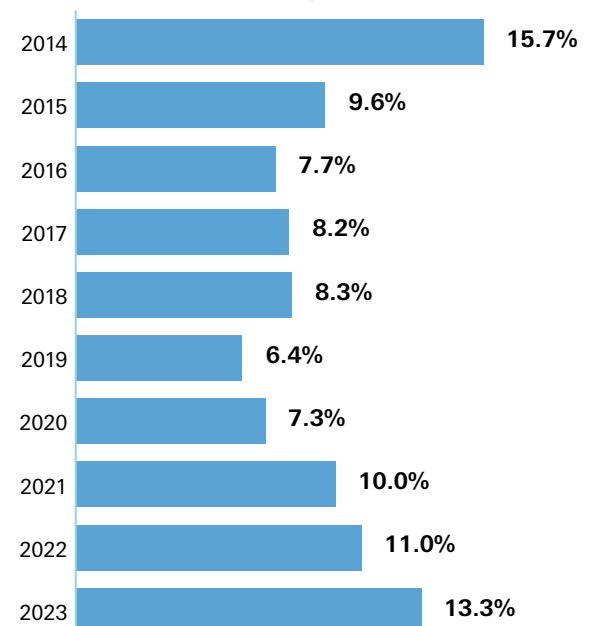
The least expensive farmland in 2023 continued to be found in the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region, where prices last year ranged from a low of \$700 to a high of \$3,100 an acre, with the average price for an acre at \$1,700. These prices remained steady last year, almost unchanged from levels seen since 2021.

In the Estrie region, agricultural land saw a 10.6-per-cent hike in 2023, hitting an average selling price of \$7,300 an acre, with the overall price range in that part of the province ranging from a low of \$2,700 to \$10,000 an acre.

Prices gaining in almost all regions

Other regions that saw significant jumps in the price of land include Bas-Saint-Laurent-Gaspésie, which saw prices increase by 15 per cent last year; Centre du Québec, which recorded price hikes of 13.5 per cent; and Laurentides-Lanaudière, where prices witnessed a 6.9-per-cent hike last year, representing a slower pace of increase from 2022, when prices jumped by 15.7 per cent.

Farmland increases in Quebec



Special Report



ANDRIY BLOKHIN/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

In the Outaouais, land prices stayed steady last year, remaining at the same levels as recorded in 2022 – with an average per-acre cost of \$4,500. Prices last year ranged from a low of \$1,600 an acre to a high of \$7,300.

On the national level

Despite only Saskatchewan and Quebec seeing land values increase more than the national average last year, only two other province posted double-digit increases in farmland values – Manitoba, with an 11.1-per-cent jump in prices; and Ontario, which posted a 10.7-per-cent hike.

All other provinces except British Columbia posted single-digit boosts in prices – with Nova Scotia seeing prices rise 7.8 per cent, Prince Edward Island posting 7.4-per-cent jumps, Alberta realizing 6.5-per-cent increases, and New Brunswick reporting 5.6-per-cent improvements.

The only province to record an overall drop in the price of farmland last year was British Columbia, where prices slipped 3.1 per cent. But the western-most province still lays claim to having the most expensive farmland in the country, with prices in the area known as South Coast, which saw prices drop just over 19 per cent, still post a per-acre average price of \$112,000, and where actual selling prices

ranged from a low of \$69,600 an acre to a high of \$264,300 an acre.

There were an insufficient number of publicly available land transactions recorded in Newfoundland and Labrador, Nunavut, Northwest Territories and

Yukon to assess changes in farmland values in those regions, the FCC reported.

The FCC's latest findings are based on prices of land sold between Jan. 1 and Dec. 31, 2023.

Cultivated Land Quebec farmland regions

	% change	Value \$/acre*	Value range**
1 Abitibi-Témiscamingue	10.9%	\$1,700	\$700 – \$3,100
2 Outaouais	0.0%	\$4,500	\$1,600 – \$7,300
3 Laurentides-Lanaudière	6.9%	\$19,600	\$7,100 – \$31,900
4 Saguenay – Lac-Saint-Jean	24.0%	\$6,100	\$2,900 – \$7,400
5 Mauricie-Portneuf	7.2%	\$10,500	\$5,400 – \$16,700
6 Montérégie	12.0%	\$22,100	\$12,900 – \$29,300
7 Centre-du-Québec	13.5%	\$13,400	\$6,700 – \$19,200
8 Bas-Saint-Laurent – Gaspésie	15.0%	\$5,100	\$1,000 – \$9,400
9 Chaudière-Appalaches	22.7%	\$8,500	\$2,600 – \$14,800
10 Estrie	10.6%	\$7,300	\$2,700 – \$10,000

*FCC reference value \$/acre.

**The value range represents 90% of the sales in each area and excludes the top and bottom 5%.

Quebec farmland regions 2021

Region	% change	Value \$/acre*	Value range**
1 Abitibi-Témiscamingue	11.6%	\$1,500	\$600 – \$3,300
2 Outaouais	14.3%	\$3,900	\$1,600 – \$6,600
3 Laurentides-Lanaudière	9.1%	\$17,100	\$8,100 – \$24,300
4 Saguenay – Lac-Saint-Jean	0.0%	\$4,300	\$1,100 – \$7,300
5 Mauricie-Portneuf	5.3%	\$8,200	\$2,300 – \$14,700
6 Montérégie	13.9%	\$18,800	\$9,400 – \$26,800
7 Centre-du-Québec	6.3%	\$10,300	\$3,500 – \$16,000
8 Bas-Saint-Laurent-Gaspésie	9.3%	\$3,700	\$700 – \$6,500
9 Chaudière-Appalaches	15.0%	\$6,100	\$1,900 – \$11,200
10 Estrie	3.5%	\$5,600	\$1,800 – \$10,000

* FCC reference value \$/acre.

**The value range represents 90% of the sales in each area and excludes the top and bottom 5%.

Cultivated Land – Quebec farmland regions 2022

	% change	Value \$/acre*	Value range**
1 Abitibi-Témiscamingue	0.0%	\$1,500	\$700 – \$3,300
2 Outaouais	15.7%	\$4,500	\$1,300 – \$8,400
3 Laurentides-Lanaudière	7.2%	\$18,300	\$7,300 – \$27,800
4 Saguenay – Lac-Saint-Jean	14.0%	\$4,900	\$700 – \$7,600
5 Mauricie-Portneuf	19.2%	\$9,800	\$4,400 – \$17,500
6 Montérégie	4.6%	\$19,700	\$9,300 – \$27,700
7 Centre-du-Québec	14.1%	\$11,800	\$4,000 – \$16,300
8 Bas-Saint-Laurent-Gaspésie	18.3%	\$4,400	\$900 – \$6,900
9 Chaudière-Appalaches	13.5%	\$6,900	\$2,000 – \$12,000
10 Estrie	17.8%	\$6,600	\$3,000 – \$11,400

* FCC reference value \$/acre.

**The value range represents 90% of the sales in each area and excludes the top and bottom 5%.

Special Report

Historic national average % change in farmland values (1985-2023)

Year	Canada	B.C.	Alta.	Sask.	Man.	Ont.	Que.	N.B.	N.S.	P.E.I.	N.L.
1985	-8.8%	-13.7%	-8.3%	-10.3%	-7.3%	-9.4%	-1.0%	1.0%	-4.3%	-11.4%	0.0%
1986	-6.9%	-6.6%	-8.2%	-8.3%	-4.9%	-4.8%	1.4%	-2.1%	1.7%	-7.9%	0.0%
1987	-10.2%	-11.3%	-7.4%	-15.3%	-6.8%	-3.9%	0.2%	0.6%	2.1%	-7.5%	0.0%
1988	-7.3%	-1.3%	-8.2%	-10.6%	-11.3%	11.4%	1.0%	-0.1%	2.6%	1.0%	0.0%
1989	4.9%	3.8%	5.7%	0.4%	6.1%	23.8%	4.3%	1.8%	13.1%	6.4%	0.0%
1990	-2.7%	3.0%	-1.1%	-6.9%	3.5%	0.8%	4.1%	5.9%	1.3%	0.0%	0.0%
1991	-5.4%	3.6%	-4.6%	-9.1%	-2.8%	1.1%	2.7%	3.8%	-1.3%	0.0%	6.1%
1992	-2.1%	7.5%	-3.2%	-3.8%	2.4%	0.6%	1.2%	0.0%	0.0%	5.2%	-2.0%
1993	2.0%	14.7%	1.9%	1.6%	2.6%	1.0%	2.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	-2.0%
1994	8.5%	10.3%	10.1%	9.5%	5.1%	3.4%	6.0%	3.6%	0.0%	21.3%	0.0%
1995	10.0%	13.6%	9.6%	11.9%	5.6%	6.9%	9.8%	24.1%	2.2%	8.5%	0.0%
1996	11.3%	9.8%	9.5%	11.0%	10.5%	12.5%	23.7%	16.3%	4.0%	0.0%	0.0%
1997	8.0%	10.5%	7.8%	5.5%	11.7%	12.3%	10.5%	7.3%	6.9%	5.8%	2.6%
1998	2.7%	-5.3%	5.1%	0.5%	3.4%	4.7%	9.2%	6.7%	0.8%	3.5%	1.7%
1999	0.2%	0.4%	5.7%	-4.8%	0.7%	2.1%	12.9%	15.4%	5.7%	10.4%	2.3%
2000	1.5%	4.4%	4.3%	-2.2%	0.6%	8.5%	11.6%	8.9%	2.5%	2.7%	3.6%
2001	1.4%	0.9%	4.2%	-1.5%	0.3%	4.8%	10.0%	1.0%	2.1%	0.8%	2.3%
2002	5.3%	4.6%	6.4%	3.9%	6.4%	6.3%	8.2%	1.2%	0.0%	0.8%	0.0%
2003	3.8%	4.6%	4.2%	3.1%	3.2%	7.2%	3.3%	4.8%	2.4%	1.5%	0.0%
2004	4.6%	9.4%	9.0%	1.9%	3.7%	6.5%	3.1%	2.6%	0.0%	0.0%	3.8%
2005	3.1%	17.2%	6.1%	1.3%	1.8%	5.7%	0.4%	-0.3%	0.4%	0.0%	3.0%
2006	4.7%	19.3%	8.9%	2.1%	5.8%	3.8%	1.5%	2.9%	2.7%	0.0%	5.8%
2007	11.6%	18.7%	17.4%	11.0%	9.1%	3.9%	4.8%	-1.4%	3.1%	-1.4%	3.3%
2008	11.7%	5.4%	9.1%	14.9%	10.7%	6.6%	11.7%	6.0%	9.7%	-2.4%	4.0%
2009	6.6%	-0.7%	4.8%	6.9%	11.7%	6.2%	5.7%	8.2%	5.7%	-1.4%	2.8%
2010	5.2%	-0.5%	4.4%	5.7%	4.7%	6.8%	3.2%	2.4%	3.7%	3.2%	0.7%
2011	14.8%	0.2%	8.7%	22.9%	4.4%	14.3%	8.9%	1.3%	6.2%	1.5%	0.0%
2012	19.5%	0.1%	13.3%	19.7%	25.6%	30.1%	27.4%	0.0%	9.8%	9.0%	0.0%
2013	22.1%	3.0%	12.9%	28.5%	25.6%	15.9%	24.7%	7.2%	1.9%	4.4%	0.0%
2014	14.3%	4.2%	8.8%	18.7%	12.2%	12.4%	15.7%	8.0%	7.0%	9.3%	0.0%
2015	10.1%	6.5%	11.6%	9.4%	12.4%	6.6%	9.6%	4.6%	6.3%	8.5%	7.7%
2016	7.9%	8.2%	9.5%	7.5%	8.1%	4.4%	7.7%	1.9%	9.1%	13.4%	-
2017	8.4%	2.7%	7.3%	10.2%	5.0%	9.4%	8.2%	5.8%	9.5%	5.6%	-
2018	6.6%	6.1%	7.4%	7.4%	3.7%	3.6%	8.3%	1.8%	-4.9%	4.2%	-
2019	5.2%	5.4%	3.3%	6.2%	4.0%	6.7%	6.4%	17.2%	1.2%	22.6%	-
2020	5.4%	8.0%	6.0%	5.4%	3.6%	4.7%	7.3%	1.3%	1.6%	2.3%	-
2021	8.3%	18.1%	3.6%	7.4%	9.9%	22.2%	10.0%	5.2%	12.3%	15.2%	-
2022	12.8%	8.0%	10.0%	14.2%	11.2%	19.4%	11.0%	17.1%	11.6%	18.7%	-
2023	11.5%	-3.1%	6.5%	15.7%	11.1%	10.7%	13.3%	5.6%	7.8%	7.4%	-

There was an insufficient number of publicly reported transactions to accurately assess farmland values in Newfoundland and Labrador, Northwest Territories, Nunavut and Yukon.

Most expensive farmland in Quebec found in Montérégie

Brenda O'Farrell
The Advocate

The most expensive farmland in Quebec is found in the Montérégie region, where an acre was sold for an average price of \$27,100 in 2023, according to data compiled by Farm Credit Canada.

The land in this region increased in value at the second fastest rate in the province over the last 28 years, the FCC's figures show, gaining in cost by a head-spinning 1,366 per cent during that time.

The FCC broke down the ever-increasing prices of farmland in 52 regions in nine province – all except

Newfoundland and Labrador – from 1996 to 2023, including 10 regions in Quebec, in a special three-page report issued earlier this month. It detailed the annual fluctuations in the price for an acre of agricultural land in each of these areas of the country.

The biggest take-away from the portrait of prices from this almost three-decade span of time is that the cost of Canadian farmland is not only increasing over time, but the rate of these price hikes is accelerating.

This economic impact of this indicator highlights the reality that many farmers are facing: The increasing cost of land is becoming a higher hurdle for new

farmers to overcome to enter the industry, inter-generation transitions of farms are becoming more difficult to structure and the economic pressure on making farms profitable given the mounting costs of expansion is growing.

In Quebec, the region with the highest rate of increase in the price of an acre of farmland was Laurentides-Lanaudière, where the price of an acre jumped a whopping 1,818 per cent in the last 28 years.

The lowest rate of increase in the price of farmland from 1996 to 2023 was reported in the Saguenay-Lac St. Jean region, where an acre of agricultural land jumped 733 per cent.

Three other areas of the province saw farmland price increases that topped the 1,000-per-cent mark – the Chaudière-Appalaches region, where it saw a hike of 1,124 per cent, and the Bas St. Laurent-Gaspésie and Estrie areas, where land increased in value at the same rate – a jump of 1,028 per cent.

All other areas of the province saw three-digit increases in the last 28 years: Centre du Québec, which jumped 914 per cent; the Mauricie-Portneuf area, which rose 878 per cent; and the Outaouais regions, which saw a hike of 827 per cent.

Quebec	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Abitibi-Témiscamingue	\$180	\$180	\$203	\$231	\$284	\$345	\$345	\$355	\$345	\$345	\$361	\$405	\$486	\$466	\$466	\$466	\$491	\$770	\$784	\$1,080	\$1,100	\$1,275	\$1,275	\$1,293	\$1,300	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$1,700
Bas-Saint-Laurent – Gaspésie	\$452	\$487	\$549	\$716	\$754	\$828	\$929	\$1,006	\$1,056	\$1,059	\$1,075	\$1,157	\$1,292	\$1,366	\$1,406	\$1,366	\$1,602	\$1,926	\$2,051	\$1,881	\$2,113	\$2,335	\$2,748	\$3,088	\$3,400	\$3,700	\$4,400	\$5,100
Centre-du-Québec	\$1,322	\$1,561	\$1,776	\$1,842	\$2,002	\$2,240	\$2,414	\$2,484	\$2,524	\$2,574	\$2,558	\$2,713	\$3,040	\$3,157	\$3,188	\$3,851	\$5,110	\$5,150	\$6,119	\$7,244	\$8,248	\$8,527	\$8,975	\$9,786	\$9,700	\$10,300	\$11,800	\$13,400
Chaudière-Appalaches	\$696	\$784	\$898	\$1,189	\$1,321	\$1,393	\$1,589	\$1,745	\$1,866	\$1,876	\$1,958	\$2,096	\$2,340	\$2,460	\$2,599	\$2,531	\$3,056	\$2,956	\$3,027	\$3,713	\$4,098	\$4,376	\$4,959	\$5,176	\$5,300	\$6,100	\$6,900	\$8,500
Estrie	\$647	\$970	\$1,070	\$1,057	\$1,285	\$1,379	\$1,446	\$1,607	\$1,754	\$1,780	\$1,850	\$1,846	\$2,142	\$2,276	\$2,366	\$2,637	\$2,772	\$2,840	\$2,881	\$3,261	\$3,607	\$3,640	\$3,777	\$4,388	\$5,400	\$5,600	\$6,600	\$7,300
Saguenay – Lac-Saint-Jean	\$750	\$893	\$896	\$896	\$814	\$814	\$936	\$855	\$794	\$774	\$855	\$1,140	\$1,059	\$1,425	\$1,425	\$1,751	\$1,873	\$1,914	\$2,565	\$2,327	\$2,712	\$3,112	\$3,527	\$3,573	\$4,300	\$4,300	\$4,900	\$6,100
Laurentides-Lanaudière	\$1,022	\$1,117	\$1,337	\$1,673	\$2,044	\$2,271	\$2,630	\$2,671	\$2,756	\$2,779	\$2,752	\$2,877	\$3,032	\$3,467	\$3,479	\$4,046	\$6,609	\$8,503	\$10,786	\$13,359	\$13,058	\$12,990	\$13,603	\$14,263	\$15,700	\$17,100	\$18,300	\$19,600
Mauricie-Portneuf	\$1,074	\$1,239	\$1,426	\$1,653	\$1,761	\$2,021	\$2,319	\$2,433	\$2,473	\$2,379	\$2,177	\$2,312	\$2,482	\$2,607	\$2,701	\$2,688	\$3,494	\$3,535	\$4,907	\$5,072	\$5,738	\$6,454	\$6,875	\$7,672	\$7,800	\$8,200	\$9,800	\$10,500
Montérégie	\$1,840	\$1,986	\$2,221	\$2,374	\$2,589	\$2,843	\$2,925	\$2,931	\$2,986	\$3,032	\$3,185	\$3,329	\$3,695	\$4,031	\$4,224	\$4,628	\$6,712	\$7,813	\$9,256	\$13,887	\$14,827	\$15,098	\$16,170	\$16,569	\$16,500	\$18,800	\$19,700	\$22,100
Outaouais	\$485	\$510	\$525	\$545	\$545	\$545	\$576	\$566	\$566	\$626	\$699	\$727	\$727	\$768	\$808	\$1,091	\$1,394	\$2,020	\$2,263	\$2,800	\$2,900	\$2,761	\$2,827	\$3,218	\$3,400	\$3,900	\$4,500	\$4,500

B.C. home to priciest farmland in Canada

Brenda O'Farrell
The Advocate

The most expensive farmland in Canada continues to be found in British Columbia, where prices actually dropped by about 3 per cent last year, making it the only province in the country where the average cost of agricultural land decreased.

But despite the first overall slip in farmland prices in more than a decade, the cost of an acre of agricultural land in the westernmost province remains staggeringly high, with the region known as South Coast leading the way. The average cost of an acre in that area of the province hit \$112,000 in 2023, according to figures compiled by Farm Credit Canada. But the range of prices reported in that region last year stretched from a low of \$69,600 to a

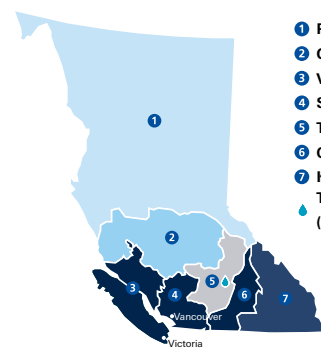
high of an eye-popping \$264,300.

What is perhaps even more astounding is that the average price in South Coast last year was actually lower than in 2022. In fact, the average price per acre in 2023 dropped 19.3 per cent compared with the previous year.

The area of B.C. with the second highest most expensive range for farmland last year was Vancouver Island, where the average cost of an acre remained at \$63,800 last year, the same as the previous year, the FCC reports. The range of prices reported in that region last year went from a low of \$61,000 to a high of \$108,000.

The least expensive farmland in B.C. – registering at an average price-per-acre of \$2,100 in 2023 – is found in the northern half of the province in a territory known as Peace-Northern.

Cultivated Land British Columbia farmland regions



	% change	Value \$/acre*	Value range**
1 Peace-Northern	-3.2%	\$2,100	\$800 – \$3,100
2 Cariboo-Chilcotin	8.0%	\$4,400	\$2,200 – \$5,500
3 Vancouver Island	0.0%	\$63,800	\$61,000 – \$108,000
4 South Coast	-19.3%	\$112,200	\$69,600 – \$264,300
5 Thompson-Nicola	N/A	N/A	N/A
6 Okanagan	-4.5%	\$32,500	\$17,800 – \$107,200
7 Kootenay	7.6%	\$24,100	\$5,600 – \$35,000
Thompson-Nicola (irrigated)	0.0%	\$20,100	\$5,000 – \$40,000

*FCC reference value \$/acre.

**The value range represents 90% of the sales in each area and excludes the top and bottom 5%.

Pastureland British Columbia farmland regions



	% change	Value \$/acre*	Provincial average 7.4%	Value range**
1 Peace-Northern	8.4%	\$1,700		\$900 – \$6,800
2 Cariboo-Chilcotin	13.9%	\$3,500		\$1,200 – \$5,800
5 Thompson-Nicola	3.0%	\$6,700		\$1,800 – \$18,000

*FCC reference value \$/acre.

**The value range represents 90% of the sales in each area and excludes the top and bottom 5%.



BALONCICI/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Canadian farmers have the potential to not only feed our own population but provide sustainable food for others across the globe. But they need the support of government to reach that goal.



John McCart
QFA President

For agriculture to grow and prosper governments need to step up

The month of March is when both the provincial and federal governments lay out their plans for the next year, with the ministers of revenue allocating sums to the respective ministries.

The provincial government unveiled its new budget on March 12. Although those of us in agriculture always hope for the best, it was disappointing to see that the sector did not receive what it deserved. And far from anything close to what it needs.

As I have mentioned before, the budget pie is limited and every segment of the population is looking for a larger slice. But top-quality sustainable food at a fair price is an essential. And farmers need to stay viable in order to produce it.

The Quebec Farmers' Association, the Union des producteurs agricoles and the Canadian Federation of Agriculture have done their work to make sure that the message has been delivered to government – if farms cannot survive, the agricultural industry will collapse.

Status quo is not an option

At the CFA annual general meeting on Feb. 27-28, the message was clear: everything that concerns farmers needs

to be augmented and that the status quo is no longer an option.

During the past year there has been an unprecedented rise in the cost of production that is hitting even the supply-managed sectors. It is amazing how the higher interest rates are crippling so many operations. The situation is drawing comparisons to the early '80s. Insurance, fertilizer, fuel, machinery, parts and even building materials all contribute to the incredible cost of growing food.

The exceptional yields in the corn and soybean sector are not able to overcome cost of production and the loss of market. When one part of the agriculture industry has a major setback – like the pork sector – the ripples spread far and wide.

Other issues persist

Resolutions passed at this year's CFA annual meeting include asking Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada to restore the Advance Payments Program funding to \$350,000 to help moderate the rising costs, to re-establish the funding for agriculture research, that funding for reforestation does not come

at the expense of cultivated land and that measures are taken to ensure the availability of water needed in the production of food.

The whole carbon-neutrality kick that the federal government is on must also be clarified. It is unsure how producers can actually reap the benefits promised.

The CFA also is asking the federal government to clear up another point. It wants the government, with the collaboration of farmers, to come up with a clear and precise methodology for harmonizing the calculation of the carbon footprints of farms. This methodology has to take into account the climate and soil conditions of the provinces and the particularities of each crop and animal production. Data is needed. Farmers are too often shown to be the problem when, in fact, we are almost the least impactful industry on climate change compared with so many others.

The CFA adopted many other resolutions, covering things like railway transportation and crossings, the need to harmonize the guidelines regulating Specified Risk Material, which deal with the handling and removal of material from slaughtering facilities to

prevent the spread of BSE, otherwise known as mad cow disease, with similar regulations in the U.S.

Sectors need support

The CFA also called for more support for a number of specific sectors, including the organic sector, that make farmers more profitable. Most of these resolutions can only be addressed by increasing federal and provincial budgets that support farming.

Many speakers during the CFA's two-day gathering addressed the issue of the feasibility of farming, which is under constant pressure from political situations across the world. Canadian farmers have the potential to not only feed our own population but provide sustainable food elsewhere. The right of the consumer to have access to sustainable food is something that is within the power of farmers to deliver with the cooperation of governments.

I know that in these tough times many consumers are facing difficult choices as to where to put their financial resources. Through education and advocacy, I hope local Canadian food is never out of reach.



Young Pontiac dairy producer stays in the game – in Montmagny

Andrew McClelland
The Advocate

As any dairy farmer knows, producing milk is a tough job.

The day-to-day work and early mornings are demanding enough. But so is the financial side of the business, especially in a market where producers are asked to expand and “go big or go home.”

That’s a fact that 20-year-old Pontiac producer Willis Egan knows from experience. He inherited a passion for dairy farming from his parents and grandparents, growing up in Shawville, about 70 kilometres up the Ottawa River from the nation’s capital.

“My grandparents were always involved on the farm,” Egan said. “I can remember feeding calves with my grandmother, and she still lives in the farmhouse on the other side of the road.”

Egan grew up a dyed-in-the-wool farm kid in a town full of farm kids. He still recalls the fun and excitement of getting the day off school when the dairy classifier would pay a visit to the family farm to appraise the Egans’ herd of Holsteins.

Life on the farm was a mix of barn work and hockey. Egan played in leagues throughout his youth, going so far as to play Midget A-level with the Pontiac Lions. It made for a lot of early mornings.

“You’d do chores in the morning, do chores in the evening after you’d got home from school, and play hockey after that,” he said.

Got hooked early

It wasn’t long before Egan was participating in every 4-H activity that was being offered, from square-dancing to provincial rallies.

“I started 4-H as early as you can,” Egan explained. “I used to show at the (Canadian Dairy) Classic Show in Toronto. And if I could, I’d stay and watch the whole show.”

Unusually for a Pontiac anglophone, Egan attended a French-language elementary school – a decision that would later serve him very well in his farm career. He picked up his second language before switching to the local English high school of Pontiac High. When it was time to think about what to do after graduation, Egan knew exactly where to go.

“My dad had gone to Mac, and graduated in around ‘99,” he explained.

“And so had my grandfather, actually. And I wanted to learn more about the management side of dairy production.”

Enrolled at Mac

So the third generation of the Egan family packed off to Macdonald Campus in 2020, enrolling in the Farm Management and Technology program. While Willis loved the process of learning about all aspects of agriculture, his heart was still in dairy production.

“I prefer dairy. That’ll always be my thing,” he explained. “But what you learn at Mac is the cash crop side of things. I could’ve learned that at home on the farm, but I guess I wasn’t paying attention because I always wanted to be in the barn with the cows!”

But Egan paid close attention to all aspects of farm management at Mac. And after his first year, a family connection helped him land an internship that helped him apply his new skills to practical hands-on dairy work.

“Shane Coates had gone to school with my dad,” Egan explained. “And I got to do my stage on his farm in Ascot Corner (near Sherbrooke). They just threw me into the mix, starting off milking the herd and then feeding, till you can do pretty much everything in the barn.”

Headed east to Montmagny

Coates was so impressed with his summer intern that he recommended him to his brother-in-law who runs an operation in Montmagny, east of Quebec City. There, owner Pierre Boulet has been running a dairy operation and buying and breeding show cows since 1993 under the name Ferme Pierstein. The company has won more than its fair share of prizes at dairy expos and the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair in Toronto.

Pierstein needed a cattle tender for the fair, and Egan needed another internship to complete his degree at Mac.

“That’s how I got started at Pierstein,” Egan explained. “We brought two entire trailers of show cows to the Royal. And next year I hope we bring fewer, because that was a lot of work!”

In July of 2022, the Egan farm in Shawville sold its dairy quota. Still wanting to pursue his passion for dairy management, Egan decided to take the leap and move indefinitely to Montmagny to work at Pierstein. On the job, he’ll wake at 5 every morning, feeds corn to the heifers, cleans out box



PHOTOS COURTESY OF WILLIS EGAN

Willis’ history of showing cattle served him well when it came time to work for Pierstein, a show cattle breeder out of Montmagny, east of Quebec City. Here, his aunt Debbie presents him with a show award at the Shawville Fair.



Willis Egan grew up on a third-generation dairy farm in Shawville, in the Pontiac region. “My grandparents were always involved on the farm: I can remember feeding calves with my grandmother.”

stalls and assist in all aspects of herd management.

The trials of being the only anglophone working around the barn in Montmagny can be both challenging and amusing for a farm kind from the Pontiac.

“At first, I had to work at it to get my French back,” Egan said. “My boss would come in, say something really quickly in French and then we’d be expected to get to work. Sometimes, I

have to ask the other staff exactly what the instructions are.”

But, of course, Egan clearly knows what he’s doing around a dairy barn and doesn’t need much direction when it comes to taking care of Holsteins.

“Dairy is always been what I want to do,” he said. “And being out here (at Pierstein) gives me a chance to do it. I’ve always wanted to be in the barn with the cows instead of out in the fields.”



Martin Caron
UPA President

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada recently released its report on net farm income in Canada for 2023, which are up 13 per cent, and 2024, which are expected to drop by 14 per cent. Even despite this year's expected drop, incomes levels are higher than the average from 2018 to 2022.

That said, the actual situation varies greatly by province.

For Quebec, the federal Agriculture Ministry figures put farm income at \$959 million in 2022. From there, it goes to \$487.1 million in 2023, which represents a 49.2-per-cent drop, and an expected \$66 million in 2024, which represents an additional loss of 86.5 per cent. Net incomes haven't been this low since 1938.

Needless to say, these projections are alarming.

Our rural areas may soon be unrecognizable if nothing is done to stem the tide. But none of this comes as a surprise to thousands of farmers, giving what they have been saying for the last two years about inflation and interest rates. The short-, medium- and long-term viability of thousands of farm businesses is at risk. This is especially true for young farmers and those in the start-up phase who face high levels of debt.

Some of the recommendations put forward by the agriculture sector have been acted on in the last few years. These include adjustments to the Advance Payments Program, the crop insurance system and the Sustainable Growth Investment Program (working capital loans). Yet, these have still fallen short of farmers' expectations and needs – and it shows in the latest numbers released.

Much more robust and sustainable action is needed to handle the backlog that has built up, both federally and provincially.

What needs doing?

For starters, we need to significantly increase budgets, support, coaching, assistance and programs for producers.

While we acknowledge recent gains made by government in the areas of food autonomy and the environment (which everyone wants to see), keeping agricultural spending under 1 per cent

The numbers are clear: Farmers demand action now

of the government's overall budget is simply not a viable or sustainable path for our province or for our country.

It is true that support for agriculture in Quebec sits slightly above the Canadian average. That is, disregarding the restrictions, requirements, costs and fees specific to la Belle Province. But even at this, it is significantly lower than the average for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the European Union and the United States. The idea that we are "among the least worst off in Canada" is slim consolation.

On the contrary, there is no justification for the gulf that sits between us and our main competitors, especially given the lack of reciprocity with respect to standards.

Management of risks

The current suite of business risk management programs also needs attention. Simply put, these programs are not set up to allow farm owners to effectively manage the risks related to climate change, crop pest management, the economy and trade.

The sector has also identified other priorities, including major updates to assistance programs for young farmers and to taxation rules specifically regarding intergenerational transfers. We also need reasonable environmental regulations that take into account the speed at which businesses can adapt to them, as well as a substantial and prompt easing of the regulatory and administrative loads producers are asked to shoulder.

These solutions are central to the ongoing mobilization to secure the future of agriculture and forestry. While our approach may differ from that of our European counterparts these days, the situation is similar and people are just as palpably fed up with it.

Producers understand as well as anyone the extent to which governments are dealing with budget constraints. But the idea that "your turn will come one day," to borrow from Loto-Québec's old slogan, just isn't cutting it any more. Neither is the double standard so often imposed on farmers when it comes to requirements, accountability and societal expectations. The injustice is an insult to their pride, and they want to see action now.



SAVERIO BLASI/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

The projected farm incomes for the current year are expected to hit lows that have not been this low since 1938.

DUES CREDIT FOR "MULTIPLE-OWNER FARMS" AND "UNDIVIDED CO-OWNERS" WITH GROSS FARM REVENUES OF

\$25,000 or less

You might qualify for the dues credit. Get informed!

Eligibility criteria for this UPA Program:

- Must be an agricultural producer registered as a doubledues paying farm (\$ 802) for 2024 and expect to have a gross farm revenue of \$ 25 000 or less for 2024;
- Must be in compliance with the dues regulations and have paid dues along with any applicable interest to the UPA, including payment of single UPA dues fee for 2024, i.e., \$ 466.80 (\$406 plus tax);
- Must complete the application form and return it to the UPA **by October 31, 2024**;
- Must demonstrate to the satisfaction of the UPA that the gross farm revenue for 2024 was \$ 25 000 or less by sending us the required documents **by July 31, 2025**.

If you meet all eligibility criteria, you must fill an application form available:

- on the UPA website at www.upa.qc.ca/en/programme-credit-de-cotisation/
- from your regional federation,
- by calling 450-679-0540, ext. 8213.



Prix de la relève Agricole offers helpful boost

Andrew McClelland
The Advocate

Jim Thompson knows all about how winning the Prix de la relève agricole can be a great honour for a young farmer.

In 2018, he and his partner Geneviève Grossenbacher received first place in the competition for their work on their certified organic vegetable operation in Lochaber-Partie-Ouest in the Outouais region.

"The first big prize we won was the Prix de la relève agricole in 2018 and we were totally blown away when we got the call saying we had won," Thompson recalled. "I would say that winning this award really confirmed to us that our farm was on the right path. It was very valourizing being recognized for all our hard work."

That hard work started in 2010, when Thompson decided to start his dream farm at the Plateforme agricole de l'Ange-Gardien, an innovative farm incubator project that helps young farmers start their business on rented land.

Today, Thompson and Grossenbacher grow 35 different types of organic vegetables at their aptly-named "Our Little Farm." The couple, assisted by their children and part-time employees, offer

boxes of vegetables sold on a subscription basis and also sell their veggies during the season direct from their farm kiosk.

"When we won the prize, we were still building our business and had recently moved to our permanent location after renting land for several years," Thompson said. "So money and cash flow were a bit of a challenge and the \$5,000 prize money was very appreciated!"



COURTESY OF PRIX DE LA RELÈVE AGRICOLE

Outouais producers Jim Thompson and Geneviève Grossenbacher won the Prix de la relève Agricole in 2018. Here, they're pictured with their sons (and on-farm helpers) Frédéric, Thomas and Nicolas.

Applications for Prix de la relève Agricole now open

Farmers under 40 are eligible

The provincial Agriculture Ministry is inviting young agricultural producers to toot their own horns and apply for the Prix de la relève agricole, the provincial government's annual award recognizing entrepreneurial excellence among young farmers.

Now in its ninth year, the prize honours a young agricultural business owner (or a group of young agricultural business owners) in animal or plant production who stand out for their skills, entrepreneurial vision, innovative approach, involvement in the community and a commitment to sustainable development.

What's more, you can nominate yourself for the prize by simply filling out a form online. Top prize earns the winner a bursary of \$7,500, while finalists receive \$3,500.

Young farmers who wish to apply have to be under the age of 40 as of

June 1, 2024; be the majority owner of the farm business for no less than three but no more than ten years as of June 1, and; run an ag business registered with MAPAQ that has generated gross income of at least \$50,000 during the last year.

Applicants must also fill out the nomination form, which asks you to describe your business model, safety measures, production techniques, sustainable development projects and community involvement. The form is ten pages in length and is available only in French.

Applications are open until May 20th. The winners will be announced in the fall.

To learn more about the Prix de la relève agricole visit: <https://www.quebec.ca/gouvernement/reconnaissance-prix/agriculture/prix-releve-agricole> (the application form is linked on the page).

Feds invest \$10.6 million into pork sector research

Brenda O'Farrell
The Advocate

The federal government announced a \$10.6-million in Canada's pork sector last month in an effort to support its position in the international market.

The money will be spent in what is described as "strategic research initiatives" to improve the sector's sustainability, resilience and growth.

More specifically, the research will aim to improve the sector's environmental and climate performance to reduce greenhouse gas impacts, stimulate greater productivity and product quality through new insights and technologies, improve animal welfare and response to diseases, and improve the competitiveness of Canadian pork producers and processors.

The federal money will be allotted to Swine Innovation Porc through the Clusters component of the AgriScience Program.

"Focusing on research in the pork industry will enable our producers and processors across the country to improve productivity

and quality," said National Revenue Minister Marie-Claude Bibeau, who made the announcement in Sherbrooke in February on behalf of federal Agriculture Minister Lawrence MacAulay.

"With this funding, we're making sure our pork producers have the tools they need to continue to be leaders in the agriculture sector," MacAulay said in a statement.

Swine Innovation Porc is made up of representatives of the Canadian Pork Council and eight provincial pork organizations. According to Agriculture Canada "its mission is to lead the national coordination and facilitation of research, knowledge transfer and commercialization initiatives to enhance the competitiveness of the Canadian swine sector."

In 2022, the latest year that statistics are available, the Canadian pork and hog sector generated about \$6.5 billion in farm cash receipts and 2.3 million tonnes of pork, two-thirds of which was exported.

FARMS HONOURED: Succession plans provide stability

From Page 1

The awards are handed out by the Sollio Cooperative Group – formerly known as La Coop fédérée – to Canadian farm businesses that have successfully transferred or established a farming business while ensuring its long-term viability and success. Sollio is a Canada-wide cooperative that seeks to provide agricultural entrepreneurs with the opportunity to draw on the best local models for farm transfers and start-ups.

Ferme Grolier in Lotbinière received top honours for its exemplary farm succession plan. Dairy and cash crop producers Élyse Groleau and Michael Plourde took

over the reins of Groleau's parents' dairy operation. Today, the farm has a milk quota of 92 kilos and 168 hectares of wheat and soybeans under cultivation.

"The Sollio Next Generation Award plays an important role not only by recognizing entrepreneurs who have successfully managed a farm succession or started a new farm enterprise, but also by highlighting innovative farming practices from across Canada," said Casper Kaastra, CEO of Sollio Agriculture.

"When farmers share their best practices and inspiring stories, everybody wins," Kaastra added.

Trends in agriculture



GALDRIC PS/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Spring is coming quickly, and the list of what needs to be fixed around the farm is probably longer than you want.



Chris Judd
The Advocate

It's that time of year to get things fixed

Each spring, I ask myself the same questions:

Why didn't I get those disc bearings ordered last fall?

Or: Is the corn planter ready to go? Did I fix the recoil on the lawnmower?

When I used to do the combining, each fall when I was finished combining corn, before I parked the machine for the winter, I sat in the seat with a pencil and paper and made a list of what should be fixed before next season before I forgot every little "squeak," stretched chain or bad bearing in the auger swing or the other things that I might forget before the fall. Then, I taped that paper with "things to do" on the window in front of the seat. If I needed to order parts, I entered the list of items required into my phone.

If we did that with every piece of

equipment that we use – from the self-propelled forage harvester to the whipper-snipper – maybe the parts would be ready when we needed them.

Remember that tire on the corn planter that had a slow leak? Or the "shear bar" that should be replaced on the chopper?

There are a dozen things that we forget from season to season.

Will we get another year out of the tires on the car?

This is also the time that garages that fix lawnmowers and roto-tillers get very busy. Better get "booked in."

It's time to service the lawnmower if you do your own. Many farms today have a good shop to fix machinery in. But there is nothing as aggravating as having a large machine torn apart and spread all over the shop, and the parts needed to fix it are "back ordered" or maybe no longer available. When that happens, you must find a machinist to make the part.

My son once waited two years for a little \$2 part to repair a tractor that was only three years old because the company no longer bought that model from the supplier, and the former supplier was no longer in business.

Singing the back-order blues

We used to keep common bearings, roller chain, sprockets and other inexpensive parts on the shelves in the shop. Recently, I went to a large supplier of generic parts, and they didn't even carry a common size of roller chain. Luckily, we still had a roll in stock on the shelf.

Today, with so many off-shore suppliers and delays in shipping, it's not uncommon to wait weeks for a part.

It's also time to get your seed ordered. Gardeners are starting to seed their own transplants for the garden. Even the seed suppliers may be getting low on certain varieties.

Farmers have already been "shopping around" for best prices on fertilizers and seeds.

It's not just a farmer thing

If you have dandelions, white grubs, June bugs, skunks that dig up your lawn, maybe you should try to get some calcitic lime to spread on your lawn.

What about the grass this year?

Will you fix up the old lawnmower? Look for a new "zero-turn" model? Or, maybe hire a gardener to mow your lawn each week when you price that new "zero-turn" and figure out how much it will cost for the gas to run it?

Maybe the lady of the house would like a part-time gardener or a new "raised garden" to get away from bending down.

Maybe just sit down and think – like I did – about what needs to be done before the grass turns green. It's only a few weeks away.



Mitchell Beer
President, Smarter Shift

Power politics in Alberta may point to opportunity for Quebec farmers

An extraordinary bit of energy market interference in Alberta may include some long-awaited good news for farmers and rural communities, and could hold lessons for Quebec as the province launches into a mammoth electricity infrastructure plan.

The good news is that Alberta farmers may get easier access to small, local renewable energy systems that cost them less than the power they draw from the provincial grid, but can still drive the irrigation systems they depend on in a crippling drought.

The saga from out west may point to the perils, but also spotlight the opportunities that Quebec producers can look for as Hydro-Québec launches a 12-year plan to expand and modernize the provincial grid, at a cost of up to \$185 billion.

The dots that connect this yarn are still a bit tenuous. Partly because Quebec's

plans for local power production were still unknown when the bigger strategy was announced in November.

But the latest twist in Alberta's continuing attack on bigger renewable energy installations may actually resolve an unforced error, an arbitrary restriction on small solar projects that are still sufficient to power the irrigation farmers need to cope with the province's severe drought.

Nearly two years ago, a feisty start-up called RenuWell was celebrating. It had just finished training a group of 15 former oilfield workers to begin cleaning up about 170,000 abandoned oil wells strewn about the province and install solar energy systems on the remediated sites. The pilot project was limited to two sites near Taber, Alta. But project founder Keith Hirsche said about 10 per cent of the abandoned wellpads could be suitable for solar development. And many of them were in the right place to deliver affordable power for farm irrigation systems.

"Less than 5 per cent of Alberta cropland is irrigated, and it generates more than 25 per cent of the agricultural value for the province," he explained at the time. "Most of the irrigation infrastructure, including pumps and pivot irrigation systems, is powered by electricity, and with our rapidly changing climate, the demand for electricity in the summer is now exceeding the winter peak. This has led the utilities to expand distribution and transmission networks which, in turn, has increased the costs of these services by 300 per cent over the past 10 years."

Alberta example can work here

The pilot project was a massive success. But the story ended there because provincial grid regulations that favoured bigger, centralized power systems and effectively shut out smaller projects like RenuWell. But the scene appears to be shifting, with regulators hinting at new flexibility to allow local projects.

That's precisely what rural landowners

in Quebec can and should be looking for as Hydro-Québec embarks on its own plan to remake and expand the grid. Announcements so far have focused on the big-ticket items – the \$185 billion to be invested by 2035, the 8,000 to 9,000 megawatts of new power production to be installed, the 35,000 new workers to be recruited and 5,000 kilometres of new transmission lines to be built.

One of the criticisms of the Hydro-Québec plan is that it downplays the potential for energy savings, and for the smaller, behind-the-meter systems that can offer farms and rural communities cheaper power that is less vulnerable to outages when the grid is brought down by severe weather. Those local leasing deals bring jobs and tax revenue to small communities that need both. And the site selection process can and should include energetic, pro-active consultation with potential host communities.

But one takeaway from the Alberta experience is that it won't happen unless communities make it happen.

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Local newspapers produce game-changing coverage

“We have boots on the ground, and often our stories get picked up by larger media.”

Nikki Mantell, publisher, Low Down to Hull and Back News

COMMUNITY NEWSPAPERS do a lot with a little. The result is game-changing coverage that not only informs the immediate regions they serve, but reflects the issues that contribute to the public conversations on a provincial and national scale.

While large media outlets were debating the possible ramifications of Bill 21, Quebec’s so-called secularism law that prohibits civil servants and other public-sector workers from wearing religious clothing or jewelry, the editor of *The Low Down to Hull and Back News* was interviewing Grade 3 teacher, Fatemeh Anvari, in the little town of Chelsea, Que., in the Outaouais region. She had just been fired for wearing a hijab.

“That’s one of the stories that wouldn’t get picked up if we wouldn’t do them,” said *The Low Down’s* publisher Nikki Mantell.

The story, broken by a newsroom with a staff of three, was picked up by the *Ottawa Citizen*, *The Globe and Mail*, the *National Post* and international outlets, including *Newsweek* and *The Guardian*.

It put a human face on Quebec’s often-virulent secularism debate. And, as Mantell put it, “changed the discourse.”

Mantell continued: “Before *The Low Down* published Ms. Fatemeh’s story, support for Bill 21 was hovering around 64 per cent. Following the story, which every major news outlet in Canada picked up, support for the bill dropped to 55 per cent.”

In another corner of the province, in the Vaudreuil-Soulanges region west of Montreal, when Bill 96 threatened to strip small bilingual towns of their dual-language status, the mayor of one of those tiny communities appeared set to let the deadline for the municipal council to affirm its will to keep the status expire. The local English-language paper in the region, *The 1019 Report*, questioned the mayor. On repeated occasions that spanned months, the mayor refused to commit whether council would vote on the needed resolution.

In response to the coverage, residents in the tiny town of 120 grew concerned. Two reporters with *The 1019 Report* started working the phones and going door to door. By the time they were done, the paper reported on the results of an exhaustive survey: a clear majority of residents of the island community of Île Cadieux wanted the town to keep its official bilingual status.

“Most of the residents credit the paper” when the resolution was finally renewed, said *The 1019 Report’s* editor Brenda O’Farrell, adding that large media outlets would never have bothered to do the legwork.

“We spread ourselves thin. We work really hard. And we’re good at stretching a buck,” said Mantell. “We put our hearts and souls into this.”

This is the type of journalism the Local Journalism Initiative helps produce. The federal funding program provides resources to hire journalists who produce civic content – coverage of health, education, rights, public policy and other essential issues.

It also ensures that members of Quebec’s English-speaking community continue to be informed. As Lily Ryan, publisher of *The Aylmer Bulletin* and the *West Quebec Post*, points out, as the province’s language of business and politics is French, English-language papers offer the minority community the opportunity to stay in touch with what is going on in their communities and government decisions.



BY THE NUMBERS	10,815 Number of LJI articles on civic issues produced at QCNA publications between April 2019 and February 2024. SOURCE: QCNA	4 Number of community newspapers launched in Quebec serving the English-speaking community since 2020. SOURCE: QCNA	518 Number of local news operations that closed between 2008 and Feb. 1, 2024. SOURCE: LOCAL NEWS RESEARCH PROJECT
	547 The number of job cuts announced by Quebec television network TVA in November 2023. SOURCE: TVA	800 The number of job cuts announced by CBC in December 2023. SOURCE: CBC	1269 Number of media jobs eliminated in Canada during first year of the COVID pandemic. SOURCE: LOCAL NEWS RESEARCH PROJECT
	4800 The number of job cuts announced by Bell Media in February 2024. SOURCE: BELL MEDIA		
	PAID ADVERTISING CONTENT SUPPLIED BY QCNA		



Community newspapers emerging as last journalistic soldiers standing

LAST MONTH, Bell Media announced its largest workforce restructuring in 30 years, laying off 4,800 workers.

In December, CBC/Radio-Canada announced plans to cut 800 jobs.

One month earlier, Quebec television network TVA cut 547 jobs.

Earlier in 2023, Postmedia, one of the largest media companies in Canada with a daily newspaper in almost every major city in the country, announced it was cutting 10 per cent of its staff, just the latest in a long string of downsizing moves that has spanned more than a decade. The cuts planned for Quebec went much deeper.

Almost every month, evidence of the continuing shift in the media landscape can be seen. And the result is fewer and fewer journalists reporting the stories that keep Canadians informed.

But in many communities a singular journalistic soldier remains standing: The community newspaper. These small, often privately-owned outlets are the last providers of reliable, professional local news.

“Community newspapers aren’t just filling the gap, they’re the whole fabric,”

said veteran journalist and president of the Quebec Community Newspaper Association Brenda O’Farrell.

That is why support for community newspapers is so important, O’Farrell says. As the media landscape continues to shift, the role these news outlets play is not only crucial, but gaining importance.

And they need to be supported by initiatives like the federal government’s Local Journalism Initiative, O’Farrell explains, referring to the funding program that helps qualified outlets hire reporters in communities across the country. But readers in these communities, have to do their part, too, she added, by subscribing to papers that offer that option, especially in Quebec where the minority-language community needs to maintain access to information in English.

Without programs like LJI and reader support, many community papers would struggle to survive.

Since 2012, journalist Marie-Ève Martel has tracked community news outlet closures across Quebec.

“For the moment, I’ve counted more than 80,” she reported late last year, af-

ter the abrupt shuttering of the Montreal daily *Metro* and its offshoots in several Montreal suburbs and Quebec City.

Each closure represents not only jobs lost, but “a hole in our social cement,” as Martel describes it.

Local media “makes us more informed, more aware and more likely to vote,” she said.

“CBC and the *Ottawa Citizen* aren’t going to cover a byelection in Chelsea,” said Nikki Mantell, the publisher of *The Low Down to Hull and Back News*, which covers the small towns in the Gatineau hills. “We have boots on the ground, and often our stories get picked up by larger media.”

“Local papers are where you hear about the most important things — health care, schools, getting your roads paved, the environment,” said Sharon McCully, publisher of *The Record* in Sherbrooke and the *Brome County News*, two papers that cover about 30 municipalities for the English-speaking community in the Eastern Townships. “These are stories that impact people directly.”

“Community newspapers aren’t just filling the gap, they’re the whole fabric.”

Brenda O’Farrell, journalist and QCNA president

The Miner Report



BUDIMIR JEVTIC/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

The 2023 growing season was a strange one. From a start with above-average temperatures and precipitation, it evolved into cool and dry periods that transitioned into an extremely wet summer with record-breaking flooding.

Whatever happened to a normal growing season?

Allen Wilder

William H. Miner Agricultural Research Institute

It has been said: "There's no such thing as normal" when it comes to seasonal weather patterns, and I'm beginning to think it's true.

Yes, we can plot a line depicting the "average" temperature and precipitation, but the conditions we experience never follow it perfectly.

As an avid skier, I enjoy tracking the running snowpack depth data from the top of the tallest mountain in Vermont (Mount Mansfield). On average there's a linear increase in snow depth until mid-March. But if you examined every year of snow data on record, you would be hard-pressed to find anything even close to linear. The same is true for environmental conditions during the growing season.

The months of December and January saw temperatures so mild that we have set a record for the highest minimum temperatures during this timeframe in

the Northeast. For this reason I'm hopeful that we will have good survival of winter forages and cover crops in the area. This also could benefit winter-sensitive grasses and forage legumes. The only trouble is that snow cover has been hit-or-miss this winter and we've been quite wet for the time period in the region (third wettest on record). Thus, if we lose plants this winter, it's probably going to be the result of ponding and ice sheeting rather than extreme low temperatures.

As for the 2023 growing season at the Miner Institute, it was a strange one. The year started out with above-average temperatures and precipitation, but then evolved into a cool and dry period that included the entire month of May.

Somewhere in June, we transitioned into an extremely wet summer pattern, which eventually brought record-breaking flooding to northern New York, Vermont and other parts of the Northeast. When we finally caught a break from the rain in September, the

corn dried down extremely quickly, with much of it being overmature by the time we were able to get onto our heavy soils.

Corn yields were fair given the circumstances, but the wet conditions took their toll on the quality of the crop, resulting in low crude protein and poor digestibility. Wet years are typically not the greatest for plant health, and that's exactly what we saw in 2023.

In addition to our usual Northern Corn Leaf Blight and leaf spot, we experienced a widespread outbreak of anthracnose this past year. This disease occurs as both a leaf blight and a stalk rot that can prematurely kill the top or even the whole plant. While this fungus doesn't produce mycotoxins, it leaves behind dead plant tissue that can easily be colonized by other organisms.

While our corn quality suffered, we made decent alfalfa/grass silage in 2023. This was aided by the dry weather in May that allowed for a timely first cut.

The rain and cooler-than-normal

weather that showed up during the mid-summer months kept the grass growing, and we tried to use every stretch of dry weather we could to take another cutting. When all was said and done, we had taken a total of six cuttings from our intensively managed fields (aside from a few wet spots) – a potential record for the farm at Miner Institute.

Looking ahead, the NOAA Climate Prediction Center continues to favour a warm bias for much of the country for the start of the growing season. While this could mean an early spring for some of us, it's always important to manage risk when planting early. The only thing certain about seasonal weather predictions is uncertainty. Who knows what the 2024 growing season will bring.

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.



Paul J. Hetzler
ISA Certified Arborist

The royal family left their winter home in Mexico earlier this month and caught a flight north. So they should be in Canada by July.

A pace like that makes Air Canada and Jet Blue look stellar by comparison. The royals in question are monarch butterflies, the same batch that flew nonstop last fall from Canada and the northern U.S. to mountainous regions in Mexico, where they hung out until spring. This group obviously drew the short straw, as they now have to fly partway back before they mate and die, leaving the next leg of the journey to a new generation.

Monarchs are found in more than 90 countries, including all of the Americas, Australia, India and Western Europe. It turns out they're doing great everywhere except North America. In fact, monarchs were added to the list of endangered species in Canada in 2023. The loss of winter habitat, pesticides and climate change are largely to blame for the 80- to 90-per-cent drop in their population over the past two decades.

A lesson in personal growth

While there are lots of reasons to admire monarchs, I value what they can teach us about personal growth.

In order to make the leap from glorified maggot to graceful flying machine, a monarch caterpillar has a meltdown on par with the Wicked Witch of the West in *The Wizard of Oz*, except when it disappears, something better comes back in its place. It has to completely liquify inside its chrysalis, becoming pea soup for a while, before it can transform into a butterfly.

Caterpillars, the juvenile stages of moths and butterflies, enter a pupal stage to change costumes, but until fairly recently we knew more about what went on inside Clark Kent's phone booth than what happened during pupation. Thanks to electron microscopy and other fancy stuff, we now understand a tiny bit more. Some caterpillars produce silk to weave cocoons in which to pupate. Others, like the monarch, for example, make pupal cases with a membranous "skin" around it, called a chrysalis.

Once pupal housing is taken care of, the hard part begins for the larval

Here is a little something to think about – caterpillar soup for the soul

monarch. Ensnared in its regal, gold-flecked chrysalis, the cute, stripey chub of a caterpillar releases enzymes that dissolve its body. All of it. For a time, that elegant chrysalis is full of nothing but green caterpillar soup. If the chrysalis was damaged at a certain phase, the future butterfly would drain out. Now, that's a meltdown.

Complete transformation

As the caterpillar becomes goo, most of its cells burst open. This is kind of like using parts from a Lego car, let's say, because you want to make a Lego plane. But instead of rearranging the blocks from the car, you smash them to dust, which you use to make a new building material.

There are a few intact cells that make it through the enzymatic blender. These are akin to stem cells. Biologists have dubbed them "imaginal cells." This is wonderfully poetic, as if part of the caterpillar could always imagine flying. I had heard that the caterpillar's immune system perceives these imaginal cells as foreign, and tries to eliminate them. This would have made an even stronger metaphor, because we all resist change at first, but alas, the science does not back up such an idea.

Imagining change

But in a sense, imaginal cells do "imagine" the future winged adult. The imaginal cells are where the caterpillar stashes the butterfly DNA. No one knows quite how imaginal cells take a soup that's mainly amino acids and fashions new kinds of cells from them. It's better than magic.

Caterpillar soup actually has a few chunks floating around. From the time a larva hatches from an egg, it contains a set of somewhat flat, more-or-less round structures called imaginal discs. Each imaginal disc telescopes out to become an appendage, like a leg, wing or antenna. It's like Ikea body parts, I guess, which is pretty handy.

By the time the chrysalis unzips and an adult monarch emerges to rub its bleary eyes, not a drop of caterpillar soup can be found. All of it was slurped up to make a gossamer-winged wonder out of a worm. Everything the caterpillar once was, now serves its new life as a butterfly.

If the butterfly belongs to the fourth and last generation of the summer, someone is going to have to break



ETTORE BALOCCHI/CREATIVE COMMONS

Monarch butterflies were added to the list of endangered species in Canada in 2023. The loss of winter habitat, pesticides and climate change are largely to blame for the drop in their population over the past two decades.

the news to it about the pending 5,000-to-6,000-kilometre trip south. In spring, monarchs take three generations, relay-style, to get all the way north, but the final brood flies to Mexico for the winter in one marathon shot.

The process of renewal

Like the monarch, achieving our fullest potential often requires we dissolve those parts of our self-image that are not really us, but are, in fact, relics from our conditioning. In my experience this is always hard. No one chooses heartache and loss, and yet those who survive very dark times often come out the other side with a new outlook that prompts them to live in ways that serve them better. Plus, no one has to turn into green slime in the process.

We commonly refer to difficult times, periods of grief or anguish, in terms of dissolution. A person might go to pieces, fall apart, dissolve in tears or have a meltdown. This latter can describe anything from a childhood

tantrum to a co-worker who loses it and yells at the boss. Meltdowns are typically short-lived.

Breakdowns can last longer: weeks, months and even years. People in this state may not be able to function well, if at all, in jobs or relationships. Nearly all who have breakdowns recover. As a result of navigating an ordeal, many people report a richer quality of life.

Writing about chrysalises during mud season may seem out of place, but I see this lull before field work begins as a reflective period, a time to imagine powerfully. It's perfect weather for enjoying a bowl of soup (anything but caterpillar), while pondering meltdowns and transformations.

Inside the monarch chrysalis, the caterpillar's cells breakdown into soup, except for the imaginal cells which will shape its new life.

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



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Anthony Hungerbuhler, St. André d'Argenteuil

Sean Burke-Bane, Stukely-Sud





Friendship forms basis for Townships sheep farm

Andrew McClelland
The Advocate

Friendship can be the most important thing in life – but it can also be a bad thing for a business. While many friends might love the idea of going into partnership together, that friendship can get tested as soon as things like finances and division of labour come into the mix.

Shelby Drew Harrison and Caitlin Aubin Hartwell know both the challenges and the joys of mixing friendship and business. In 2019, they started Triple Nickel Farm together, a small operation dedicated to breeding and marketing Katahdin hair sheep.

From the start, Harrison and Hartwell had a few basic ground rules: the farming should be fun, should be something they can do with their kids – and it should never get in the way of their friendship.

“Before we go too crazy into this we decided that our friendship was always going to come first,” Harrison recounted at a Farm Forum videoconference hosted by the Quebec Farmers' Association on Feb. 28. “We could agree to disagree, but if we couldn't do that, there was no point in us getting animals together because it wasn't worth losing our friendship over.”

Both farm kids with deep ties to the anglophone agriculture community of the Eastern Townships, Harrison and Hartwell had similar upbringings.

Hartwell grew up in Sherbrooke, but spent as much time as she could at her grandparents' beef and maple operation in Sawyerville. Harrison grew up in Canton-de-Hatley, on her mother's cow-calf and light lamb farm, often helping out with milking on her grandparents' nearby dairy operation. Both took degrees in farm management after high school – Hartwell at the CÉGEP de Sherbrooke and Harrison at Macdonald Campus in Ste. Anne de Bellevue. And both are past recipients of the QFA's agricultural bursary program, the Warren Grapes Awards.

Parallel upbrings

“It's really funny because we didn't meet till later in life,” Harrison said. “But our lives paralleled in a lot of ways.”

Those lives paralleled in another way when Hartwell's husband, Adam,



COURTESY OF SHELBY DREW HARRISON AND CAITLIN AUBIN HARTWELL

The Triple Nickel Farm show crew (and families), all dressed up for the Ayer's Cliff 2023 Fair: (FROM LEFT TO RIGHT) Rowan, Jade St-Martin, Rhys Paradis, Myla, Caitlin Aubin Hartwell, Jacob, Adam, Thomas, Abby, Kynlee, Shelby Drew Harrison, Kensi and Travis.

and Harrison's husband, Travis, began working together as welders. At a shop Christmas party, Shelby and Caitlin hit it off and realized just how many interests and experiences they shared. Both were in the midst of raising small children, and both had fledgling off-farm jobs; Harrison as an animal nutritionist for Moulée Vallée in Richmond and Hartwell taking contracts from MAPAQ and the Club Agroenvironnemental de l'Estrie.

“How we actually got into sheep was just by chance,” Hartwell explained. “In 2018, my brother-in-law gave my kids three lambs. I had never been around sheep. I'm used to cattle. I love cattle. That's what I thought I wanted to have.”

Hartwell and her family were intrigued that they had been given “hair sheep,” specifically the Katahdin hair sheep, a breed developed in Maine by breeder Michael Piel. Katahdins are a cross between St. Croix sheep, Suffolk and other breeds to produce a meat sheep that is parasite-resistant. More importantly, Katahdins shed their winter coat.

“We discovered they didn't need to be sheared!” Hartwell explained. “Perfect for a family – way less maintenance!”

Hartwell found herself falling in love with sheep tending and was able

to pasture her new herd at her grandfather's farm in Sawyerville and her own land right beside. During COVID, she enrolled in an online course offered by Université Laval on sheep production and quickly learned the ins and outs of rearing, breeding and marketing her flock.

Intrigue was the trigger

Harrison had shown her Canadian Arcott sheep at fairs as a child. When she heard that Hartwell had acquired some Katahdins, she was intrigued.

“That's how everything finally linked up,” Harrison said. “I had sold my Arcotts when I moved to Mac, and when Caitlin said that her children were interested in showing sheep at a fair, I really wanted my girls to have that experience. It was the perfect organic start to working together.”

The courageous young mothers packed up their five small children – and five sheep – and headed to the Ayer's Cliff Fair.

“We had a 24-foot-long camper with nine people in it, and we were stacked up on top of one another,” Harrison said with a laugh. “But we all walked away from the fair saying, ‘Let's do this again!’”

Hartwell and Harrison started to

get serious about expanding their flock. They found a Katahdin ram and ewe lambs from a breeder 90 minutes away, and their very first purebred lamb was born on the farm on Valentine's Day 2024.

“So right now our herd is five registered ewes, two registered rams, and then six commercial ewes,” Hartwell said. “Our plan is to grow as much as we can within the infrastructure we have.”

Currently, Triple Nickel could fit between 20-25 sheep in the barn. Harrison and Hartwell use rotational grazing and keep the Katahdins on pasture as much as possible in summer. It's proved to be an adventure for their friendship and their families – and a business that can grow.

“We're trying to grow with what we have,” Hartwell said. “Without investing in more land, or building more barns with the way interest rates are headed. Long-term, we could have 100 or 200 sheep, but it needs to ...”

Before Hartwell could finish her sentence, Harrison chimed in: “Our goal is always to have fun.”

“We never had access to, say, take over a 100-kilo dairy farm, or a cow-calf operation. But we always want to make sure we enjoy it, and we both love farming.”



Quebec corn prices take sharp drop

Ramzy Yelda

Senior Market Analyst, *Producteurs de grains du Québec*

Quebec corn prices have dropped sharply in the last few weeks. According to several traders, Quebec prices had been much higher than Ontario values during harvest. This was due to tight carrying stocks and a relatively small crop. Moreover, Quebec producers were restraining their sales.

According to data compiled by the *Producteurs de grains du Québec*, corn sales in October to December were down by 117,000 tonnes, or 15 per cent, compared with the same quarter in 2022. There was a disconnect between the prices Quebec producers had in mind, and Ontario corn offers. As a result, the industry and traders bought significant volumes of corn in Ontario.

Moreover, in a bearish market, users have little incentive to cover their future needs: they buy to satisfy

their immediate or very short-term requirements and wait to cover their short- and medium-term demand. When the market falls, time is on the buyer's side.

With sharply lower local prices, the Quebec corn market seems to have found a new equilibrium since February. Buying and selling has resumed. There is still Ontario corn coming in, but this grain was contracted at harvest. Moreover, we are now closer to export values. Exporters remain bearish but inquiries have resumed.

As for the Chicago Board of Trade, nobody knows what the futures market will do. Corn has traded below \$4/bu, before regaining some strength.

Have we reached the floor?

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's preliminary forecasts are bearish for 2024/25, but the market will be driven by U.S. seedings over the next two months.

Carbon market unfair to Quebec grain growers

In the wake of the publication of the results of the Feb. 22 carbon offset credit auction, the *Producteurs de grains du Québec* would like to once again point out the recurrent negative effects these auctions are having on production costs in the grain sector.

The Quebec government's carbon-pricing rules create a competitive imbalance between Quebec producers and their counterparts in other Canadian provinces and midwestern American states.

In the grain sector alone, producers are shelling out \$27.9 million per year for the right to emit greenhouse gases for energy inputs. More than \$18 million of this is specifically for farm diesel, according to the Quebec grain growers' association's calculations, which were updated to reflect data from the most recent carbon-credit auction.

"We demand that the Quebec government exempt the agricultural sector from the carbon tax or compensate it for inherent costs, such as farm diesel," said PGQ president Christian Overbeek. "Quebec's carbon-pricing method currently puts the province's producers at a distinct disadvantage. Our carbon market places more restrictions on grain producers than the federal government's carbon tax, which is what applies in most provinces.

"Furthermore, our American competitors do not have to pay a cent for carbon," Overbeek added. "This means Quebec producers are de-facto disqualified from international economic competition."

What grain growers were looking for in latest Quebec budget

The *Producteurs de grains du Québec* were looking for a number of things from the Quebec government latest budget.

Among the demands the association made were:

1. The government should fund programs to a level that is on par with our competitor jurisdictions in Canada and abroad (currently it is much lower), and that allows Quebec producers to remain competitive in future.
2. The government should model its approach on practices used in Europe to bolster the grain sector's competitiveness, specifically in agri-environmental issues and support for remote regions.
3. The government should create an agri-environmental compensation policy that is visionary and designed for the long-term with \$50 million to support producers' transition toward more sustainable practices.
4. The government should provide the economic tools needed to address issues specific to producers in priority regions.
5. The government should take a more equitable approach to carbon pricing by providing compensation for inherent production costs and allowing farmers to trade offset credits.
6. Municipal taxation powers should be reviewed for fairness, and they should be based on the services provided.

Mark your calendars: PGQ AGMs

The annual general meeting for the Quebec grain growers will be held in Drummondville on March 21-22. This year's theme is "S'adapter, ensemble" (Adapting together). Once again this year, nearly 300 grain producers are expected to attend the provincial gathering. For more information, visit pgq.ca.

Agri-environmental practices compensation: registration opens in March

The PGQ applauded the announcement of the new initiative to provide compensation for agri-environmental practices (also known as RPA) on Feb. 16. The initiative is designed to support efforts to implement agri-environmental practices under the Sustainable Agricultural Plan (PAD). Registration is open until March 31, or until the funds are depleted.



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.





Pickled Onions



CYNTHIA GUNN, THE ADVOCATE

Pickled onions can make many dishes a dash better, like a hamburger or a grilled cheese sandwich, for starters.

INGREDIENTS

1 large red onion, sliced
½ cup boiling water
¼ cup apple cider vinegar
¼ cup white vinegar
Herbs to your liking (e.g., bay leaves, rosemary, fennel)
salt and pepper to taste
1 tsp. sugar, maple syrup or honey

PREPARATION

Place onions in a wide-mouth glass jar.
 Bring other ingredients to a simmer.
 Cool 2 minutes and then pour over onions.
 Cool, cover and refrigerate for up to 4 weeks.

Sometimes you must travel far to find a simple tasty treat

Cynthia Gunn
 QFA's Food Writer

One of the best things about travelling is getting home. I heard that somewhere, and it rings true, to a greater or lesser degree. This depends on a number of factors, of course, like the length of trip and reason for leaving the home ground in the first place.

The older you get, the comfort of one's own bed seems to beckon brightly. On the contrary, a return to responsibilities may loom heavily for both young and old, as my teen agreed, in the form of work or school.

Then, there are all the in-betweens, like happiness to see a family pet, and excitement to see school friends, and the growth in the garden.

If your reason for travelling is to visit family and friends who you get to see rarely, there is the inevitable sadness of parting and knowing that it could be a long time until such a trip can be repeated.

Among the many things shared in such a visit, food, like games, is a given, especially if the weather is less than cooperative. On a recent visit to some old friends and family for whom food provides great enjoyment, we partook of hearty stews and smoked cheddar scrambled eggs in the face of sleet and slushy snow. With morning coffee also came a delectable treat that bears no name. It was made in one of those places that only a local would know about.

Down the street from a funky café, we were guided to a light industrial park within which a bakery was housed that produced this perfect golden-brown crispy buttery concoction, kind of a combination between a croissant and a scone.

For those who lean towards more traditional North American fare, friends also steered us toward, arguably, the best apple fritter that Canada has ever produced. The purveyor of this treat was conveniently located on main street.

But what good is that to us now? Treats and funky cafés, like the friends and family, are sadly several thousands of miles away.

So how to provide a little solace for the post-travel blues?

Make a little something that reminds you of what was left behind. In this case, something from our meandering and casual conversations about food enjoyed and to be enjoyed in days to come.

During one of these lazily indulgent conversations a simple recipe for pickled onions was given. The source swore to its ability to better many dishes, among them, of course, is the humble but mighty hamburger. How about on grilled cheese? I suggested. "Oh, that would be excellent," they agreed.

So, when I arrived home, after greeting the pets and the garden, I made a jar of pickled onions, got out my best cheddar cheese and bread, and enjoyed a simple taste of a holiday past.

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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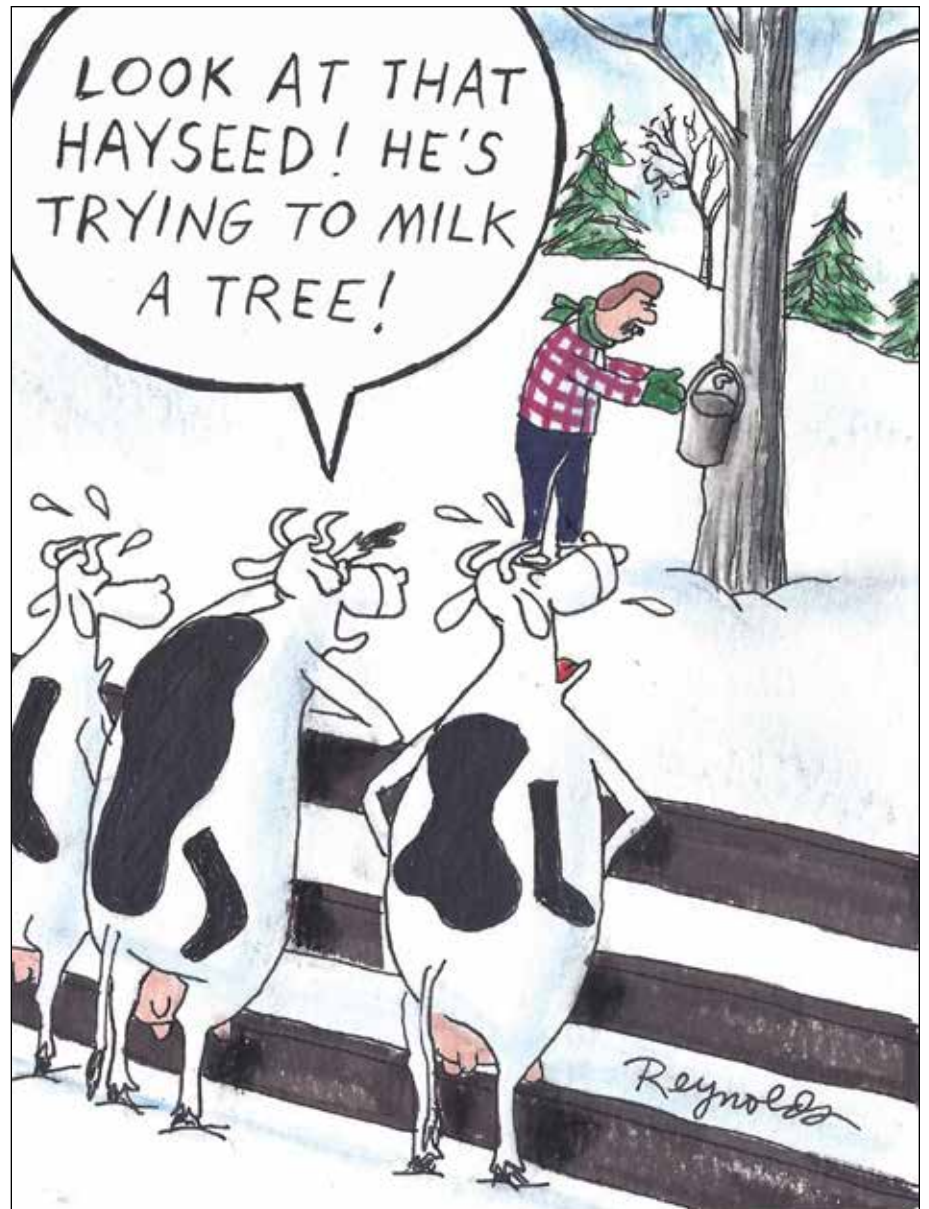
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QFA videoconferences

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.

Try it. You might like it.

The next one is Wednesday, April 24, at 7:30 p.m.

The topic is still to be determined. We will keep you posted.

Here are some of the topics and guests we have had so far:

MARCH:

Sowing Seeds of Change:

"The Canadian Agricultural Human Resources Council's breakdown on the agricultural labour market: Where are the workforce shortages? Which sectors of Canadian agriculture are the hardest hit? What can small farmers do to attract and retain employees."

FEBRUARY:

The Little Dream that Could: Raising Sheep & Farm Kids

Caitlin Aubin Hartwell and Shelby Drew Harrison of Triple Nickel Farm in the Eastern Townships shared their story about how they are bringing attention to the Katahdin hair sheep, a breed that's both great for meat and for growing a hair coat that does not require shearing. And how they handle starting a business, a friendship and raising their families.

JANUARY:

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

April Stewart discussed the barriers girls and women in agriculture must overcome and what Canada's agriculture industry could look like if we drew on the strengths and skills of everyone.

