Quebec Farmers'
Advocate

Vol. 45, No. 9 – October 2025 Publication Mail No.: 40033773

"The Task Force on Linguistic Policy has read and analyzed the CAQ so-called 'Constitution' legislation, Bill 1, and determined it is a threat to all minority communities, but especially the 1.25 million English-speaking Quebecers. And it is a threat to Quebec's future in Canada."

—Statement issued by the Task Force on Linguistic Policy, a non-partisan, grassroots not-for-profit organization formed to stop Quebec's Bill 96, which updated Quebec's Charter of the French Language, *and Canada's Bill C-13, which modernized the federal* Official Languages Act.

QFA VIDEOCONFERENCES

Wednesday, Oct. 29
at 7:30 p.m.

Risky Business: Agriculture and Trade Politics in a New World Order

See page 4 for details.

Arlene Dickinson, best known for her role on CBC's Dragons' Den, participated in a forum hosted by the Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute in Ottawa on Oct. 2.

Arlene Dickinson: Agriculture must be declared critical sector

Brenda O'Farrell
The Advocate

If Canada wants to diversify its economic reliance on the U.S. market, it must declare agriculture and the agri-food industry a critical sector.

That was the message from Alrene Dickinson, one of the country's highest profile investors, who spoke at the Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute forum in Ottawa earlier this month.

"It's time for us to act. It's time for us to move. It's time for us to do things," Dickinson said.

Perhaps best known for her role on CBC's *Dragons' Den*, where she listens to pitches made by up-and-coming entrepreneurs, Dickinson has turned her attention to the food sector as part of her pitch to transform the Canadian economy as it navigates its way through tariff threats from U.S. President Donald Trump.

"We talk about sovereignty all the time. What could be more important than food sovereignty?" Dickinson said in an interview with *The Advocate* at the forum. "If we don't have food sovereignty, we don't have sovereignty."

"This is absolutely a marketplace and an industry and a sector that needs full attention and can provide gigantic returns to our country – not just financially, but from a social perspective as well," she explained.

Dickinson, who is the founder and general partner of District Ventures Capital and a member of the Prime Minister's Advisory Council on Canada-U.S. Relations, is publicly pushing for greater investment in the food production and food processing sectors.

In an opinion piece published in *The Globe and Mail* last month she put it plainly: "Food security is now the world's top priority. Demand is exploding, capital is flowing and Canada has the resources to lead. Yet, unless we move quickly, and now, others will take the markets that should be ours."

See DICKINSON, Page 16.

CANADIAN DAIRY QUOTAS:

Trump says 'everything' part of trade talks

Andrew McClelland
The Advocate

Troubling signs indicate that Canada may be putting supply management on the bargaining table at upcoming trade talks with the United States, according to media reports.

In early October, *The Globe and Mail* cited two unnamed sources who claimed that greater access to Canadian markets for U.S.-sourced dairy products was being discussed in Ottawa during consultations over an upcoming review of the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA). The sources said they were "not authorized to speak publicly on the matter."

Concerns among Canada's supply-managed sectors were raised again only a week later when U.S. President Donald Trump, sitting beside Prime Minister Mark Carney in an Oct. 7th press conference, replied that "everything" would be up for negotiation.

In footage from the Washington press conference, Trump is explicitly asked: "Will you sign a trade deal with Canada that doesn't include supply-managed goods – like dairy, for example?"

"Dairy – it's gonna include everything," Trump replied.

The rumours – and Trump's insistence regarding what is negotiable with Canada – contradict much of what the Liberal governments' official stance on supply management has been in recent years.

In a tweet sent April 2nd from Carney's account on X, the prime minister declared, "Supply management is part of our economic sovereignty. When it comes to negotiations with President Trump, it's off the table."

See TRADE, Page 11.

Just the facts

624

The number of agriculture-related fatalities in Canada from 2011 to 2020. Just over half of those incidents – 54 per cent – involved machinery.

Source: Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

$14.5 billion

That is the amount of canola products Canada exported in 2024, with $4.9 billion going to China.

Source: Canola Council of Canada

58%

The percentage of the 624 fatal agriculture-related accidents in Canada from 2011 to 2020, meaning 361, that claimed the life of the farm owner or operator.

Source: Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

372

As of Oct. 1, that is the number of forest fires in Quebec this year that have claimed 1,053 hectares of woods.

Source: Quebec Ministry of Public Security

22X

Investment in American agri-food technology startups has been 22 times larger than Canada's over the past five years, which analysts say is pulling Canadian innovation south for capital, mentorship and market application.

Source: RBC report, The Next Generation of Growth: Cultivating a new crop of agriculture talent and innovators

SILOS OF FALL

MADELEINE LANGLOIS, THE ADVOCATE

Surrounded by the colours of the season, these two silos that stand along a rural road in Rigaud, near the Ontario border, prepare for another season. The colours were just entering their peak when this photograph was taken, providing a view that, somehow, never gets old.

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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Agricultural or forestry producer, rural resident or retired farmer:

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Signature ....

Membership includes

- a one year subscription to the Quebec Farmers' *Advocate*
- discounts on QFA sponsored events and services
- free advertising in the *Advocate*'s classified ads
- voting privileges at the QFA Annual General Meeting

Quebec Farmers' Association
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Longueuil, Quebec J4H 4E7

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

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News

Pushback aims to stop non-producers from buying farmland

Brenda O'Farrell
The Advocate

With the price of farmland increasing year over year, many Canadian farmers are finding it harder to buy quality crop land. But a growing concern pushing the affordability issue is non-farming investors buying land as they seek alternative assets resistant to economic turbulence and market downturns.

According to Farm Credit Canada, Canadian farmland values jumped an average of 8.6 per cent per year from 2015 to 2024, with the largest price jumps seen in three of the last four years analyzed – from 2022 to 2024. This value increase is what investors are seeking.

And it is changing the portrait of farmland ownership as investment firms, pension funds and wealthy investors wade into the market.

This trend is witnessed most in the Prairie provinces, where the purchase of large swaths of land have been seen. But it is also happening in Quebec.

In December 2024, the Quebec government announced an immediate halt to any purchase of agricultural land by an investment fund.

Part of a bill to bolster the protection of farmland in the province, the ban on the purchase of farmland by large funds was implemented immediately – even before the bill was approved into law in March.

The bill also introduced new restrictions on the sale and use of farmland in the province in certain circumstances.

In other provinces, other restrictions have been implemented.

For example, in Manitoba, non-Canadian entities can only own 40 acres of land. In Saskatchewan, foreign investors are limited to 10 acres, and large investors, including Canadian pension funds, are barred from the market.

The National Farmers Union, a Canadian non-profit organization, has called for the creation of a public registry disclosing farmland ownership.

But Canadian-based pension funds are looking at investments in farmland in other countries, too.

In 2021, the *Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec* created a division that focuses on farmland investments in the U.S. and Australia, investing $2 billion.

The Caisse is not the only large investor in foreign farmland. The Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan has agriculture interests in Australia and the U.S.

Land in Lévis returned to farm zone

Brenda O'Farrell
The Advocate

The Quebec government last month announced the return of 110 hectares of land to the agricultural zone in the area around Lévis, across the St. Lawrence River from Quebec City.

The move comes following the government's acquisition of the assets of the Rabaska Limited Partnership in December of 2024.

The government described its plan as a "balanced approach," explaining in a statement that it would protect "existing cultivated areas and bringing abandoned land back into cultivation, while reserving a portion of the site, 167.1 hectares, for future industrial development."

In February 2024, the provincial government announced it would spend $38 million to acquire 270 hectares of land in Lévis from a consortium that had acquired the area 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.

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, the government said when the purchase was announced in early 2024.

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, when Russian gas supplier Gazprom pulled out of the project, citing a drop in natural gas prices.

Since 2013, the Union des producteurs agricoles had been pushing for all 270 hectares of land at the site be returned to the agricultural zone.

Quebec farmland values jump another 2.6% in first half of 2025

Increase slower than national average, but continues 39-year trend: FCC

Brenda O'Farrell
The Advocate

Agricultural land in Canada continued to gain value in the first half of 2025, although increases seen in Quebec were below the national average, according to the latest figures released by Farm Credit Canada earlier this month.

The value of farmland across the country increased by an average of 6 per cent in the first six months of the 2025. This pushed the year-over-year upward trend in land values to 10.4 per cent for the period from July 2024 to June 2025. This rate of increase was slightly sharper than what was seen in the previous year.

In Quebec, the value of agricultural land gained only 2.6 per cent in the first half of the year, placing it behind provinces like Manitoba, which saw the largest hikes at 11.2 per cent; New Brunswick, which saw a 9.4-per-cent gain; Alberta, where land values rose by 6.6 per cent; and Saskatchewan, where gains matched the national average at 6 per cent.

Farmland prices in Ontario and British Columbia remained unchanged in the first half of the year.

Analysts with the FCC said the ongoing increases in the value "reflect a complex mix of market forces in 2025" where "regional dynamics remain a defining factor."

In Quebec, where the year-over-year gain for the period of July 2024 to the end of June 2025 was 3.1 per cent, analysts who reviewed the sale transactions in the province said "the combined impact of rising interest rates in 2022 and 2023, declining grain prices and expected lower yields in increasingly being felt, despite interest rates gradually falling since the summer of 2024."

These factors, they continued, negatively affected the income of large-scale crop producers, and limited their investment capacity.

Earlier this year, the FCC published its annual analysis of farmland sales recorded in 2024. It showed the value of farmland in Quebec jumped by an average of 7.7 per cent last year, less than the national average of 9.3 per cent and below the double-digit increases seen in the province in the three previous years.

In Quebec, farmland values have seen consistent year-over-year increases for the last 39 years, with the most pronounced hikes recorded from 2011 to 2015. Last year's 7.7-per-cent hike comes following a 13.3-per-cent hike in 2023, an 11-per-cent jump in 2022, a 10-per-cent increase in 2021 and a 7.3-per-cent improvement in 2020.

In the Montérégie region, where the highest prices for farmland in the province continue to be recorded, the value of land jumped 3.2 per cent 2024, with the average price hitting $22,800 per acre. The average price was $700 an acre more than in 2023, according to transaction data compiled by FCC. Sales prices last year ranged from $14,400 to $30,300 per acre in the region. That is before the most recent increases seen in the first half of this year of 2.6 per cent are factored in.

	Average % Change		
Provinces	Jan 2025 - June 2025 (6 months)	July 2024 - June 2025 (12 months)	Jan 2024 - Dec 2024 (12 months)
B.C.	0.0%	5.2%	11.3%
Alta.	6.6%	10.3%	7.1%
Sask.	6.0%	12.0%	13.1%
Man.	11.2%	14.4%	6.5%
Ont.	0.0%	1.8%	3.1%
Que.	2.6%	5.8%	7.7%
N.B.	9.4%	14.6%	9.0%
N.S.	1.0%	4.0%	5.3%
P.E.I.	2.3%	2.1%	1.4%
Canada	6.0%	10.4%	9.3%

FARM CREDIT CANADA

This chart shows the average farmland values change in the first half of 2025 by province.

QFA videoconferences

Save the date!

Risky Business: Agriculture and Trade Politics in a New World Order

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 29, 7:30 P.M.

With Tyler McCann, managing director of the Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute

How much importance does agriculture actually have in international trade talks where larger portions of the economy can be affected? Would Ottawa protect supply management in a sweeping trade deal as it has promised? And how should ag producers prepare in the long-term?

Tyler McCann has been advising government ministers for well over a decade. And, as managing director of the Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute, he keeps a close eye on how trade politics are changing – and what they mean to farmers.

Join us as McCann discusses what is sacred and what is expendable in trade deals and ag policy.

Zoom link: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84899497380?pwd=1Ds0xNqorFwZCvw7EOaJFaIMA3pg6Z.1

Meeting ID: 848 9949 7380
Passcode: 540241

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

To be added to our email list so you never miss a videoconference, write to qfa_advocate@yahoo.ca

News

Infractions in Temporary Foreign Worker program triple

Andrew McClelland
The Advocate

The federal government has reported that 36 employers have been banned from the Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) program this year for abuses and not complying with regulations.

Employment and Social Development Canada, the department of the federal government responsible for developing and managing social programs and services, also stated it handed out nearly $5 million in fines to companies for non-compliance.

"The TFW program is a last-resort measure for businesses," said Patty Hajdu, minister of Jobs and Families. "It is no substitute for Canadian talent, and its misuse will never be permitted."

In the last fiscal year, the department inspected 1,435 employers for compliance, ramping up its efforts to uncover what it calls "bad actors" in the TFW program. Ten per cent were found to be non-compliant.

The most shocking case comes from St. Simon, New Brunswick, where Bolero Shellfish Processing Inc. received a 10-year ban from the program and a fine of $1 million. The federal government said the seafood processor had broken laws for hiring and recruiting employees, not fulfilled the pay or working conditions in the job offer, and had not done enough to prevent abuse or reprisals in the workplace.

"To date, this is the biggest penalty ever issued by the department," the news release said.

Farm employer banned

Employment and Social Development Canada also reported that an employer in the agriculture sector was fined $212,000 and banned from the TFW program for two years for failing to provide proper working conditions and for not providing the required documentation to inspectors.

The department does not publish the names and locations of offending businesses in its new releases. However, through a public website which lists business names and the amount of the fines issued to them, it is possible to deduce the addresses and industry sector of some of the banned and penalized companies.

"Penalties more than doubled from $2,067,750 to $4,882,500," said the department in an Oct. 6 news release. This "resulted in 36 employers being banned from the TFW program, a three-fold increase from last year."

The federal government has been keeping a close eye on the TFW program recently. That comes on the heels of two international organizations loudly and roundly criticizing what Canada calls "a last-resort option for employers who cannot find qualified Canadians and permanent residents to fill job vacancies."

In January, Amnesty International published a report describing the TFW program as "inherently exploitative and discriminatory."

The report, which drew on interviews with 44 temporary foreign workers in Canada, is chock-full of instances of employers underpaying their workers, deducting the price of their plane tickets from their wages, and insisting workers not be paid overtime. One agricultural worker from Guatemala lost part of his finger on the job and was asked by his employer to pay back $2,000 of wages for driving him to the hospital and dealing with the paperwork.

Similarly, in 2023, a human rights expert appointed by the United Nations called the program a "breeding ground for contemporary forms of slavery."

"It is clear that improvements to the TFW program are needed," said Employment and Social Development Canada in its Oct. 6 statement. "The Government of Canada continues to strengthen the TFW program's integrity and to enhance temporary foreign worker protections."

Part of that strengthening seems to be Ottawa's plan to reduce how much the economy relies on temporary foreign workers. In September, Prime Minster Mark Carney said his government aims to reduce the total number of temporary foreign workers and international students to less than five per cent of Canada's population by the end of 2027.

"The temporary foreign worker program must have a focused approach that targets strategic sectors and regions," Carney said. "We are welcoming people to our country. We have to make sure we have the capacity to fulfil that welcome."

It's important not to confuse the Temporary Foreign Worker program – which allows Canadian employers from dozens of industries to hire foreign workers to fill temporary jobs – with the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP), which allows primary agriculture employers to bring in seasonal workers from Mexico and the Caribbean.

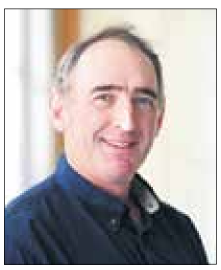
Canadian farm businesses can hire workers through both the TFW program and SAWP. The TFW, and the infractions incurred against it, is not exclusively agricultural.

A list of employers who have been found non-compliant can be found at: www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/work-canada/employers-non-compliant.html

QFA Editorial

MAX ACRONYM/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Perhaps it is nostalgic to think that things on the farm used to be easier a few decades ago. Things were not as stressful, expensive and risky like they are today.



John McCart
QFA President

Farming is changing, and it makes me wonder: Will the next generation even want to keep farming?

I have been involved in farming my whole life. I did chores while going to school. I received my diploma in agriculture from McGill University at Macdonald Campus in 1983. I worked on the family farm and then became a part owner in 1990, first with my father and then with my wife, Darlene, in 1997. I have also been involved in farm organizations for more than 30 years, including my time with the Union des producteurs agricoles, the Argenteuil Agricultural Society and with the Quebec Farmers' Association.

Despite all the changes and progress I have seen over the last 40-plus years, I have experienced quite a bit, and I have spoken to many farmers from across Quebec and Canada. And I wonder if we can ever get back to the good old days.

At a recent QFA online Farm Forum, Alberta-based rancher Steve Kenyon talked about the importance for a farmer to be able to run a farm as a business. One of the things that stayed with me is that most farms today are really working for big agri-business. Changes and progress usually means a lot of investment, and that isn't cheap. Gone are the days of paying any kind of large machinery without a huge loan. The actual cost has become irrelevant because everything is done by payments. Farmers generate a lot more revenue these days, but there is always big-agri taking its share.

Costs keep going up

The cost of seed, fertilizer, herbicides, machinery, investment in building technology, and even climate-change practices cost a lot of money. For the producers who are at the mercy of world markets and politics, the future looks bleak.

Yes, the record beef prices right now are amazing, but they are not sustainable. And I am sure the prices barely make up for the years of record-low returns.

I once asked a representative of Fertilizer Canada what the future looked like for prices. He said they would be fair. It is impossible to get ahead without someone else willing to take your profits. Everything has become so much more expensive since the pandemic. Parts and services are big deals now.

It's tough to compete

A few days ago, my wife and I visited an apple orchard to stock up for the fall. As I spoke to the owner, she explained how the prices need to match the cheap imports from the U.S. Even with a good harvest, it was going to be hard to be in the black. So many issues affect her income, the weather being the most important. But there are other issues, like the cost of using temporary foreign workers keeps rising. But what is the alternative?

The QFA over the past few years has showcased many new producers who are trying new things to make that extra income, and keep as much money on the farm. But those efforts require a lot of business savvy.

Something has got to give

QFA's video conferences have also included experts in insurance, farm transfers, new technologies and more, and farmers are still only able to keep one step ahead of creditors. At some point, there will need to be a readjustment of the farm model. The model has to include a way to keep the farm life profitable without holding the consumer hostage.

Perhaps I am being nostalgic, but things seemed a lot easier when I was younger. And I hope the good old days will return so that the next generation will wish to remain on the farm.

Climate of change

Emerging form of storing carbon has Quebec connection

Technique harnesses enhanced rock weathering by spreading wollastonite rock dust on fields

Christopher Bonasia
The Advocate

While soil carbon stored in organic matter can be released from unforeseen changes in operations and environmental conditions, inorganic carbon storage offers a longer-lasting solution – and Quebec may have a homegrown source.

Soil organic carbon is often a key focus for farmers' capacity to bring down agricultural emissions. By adding organic matter to the soil – by incorporating cover crops or spreading manure – carbon from that vegetal matter gets tied up underground, rather than returning to the atmosphere as a greenhouse gas. But this carbon can be released if tilling practices expose it to too much oxygen, or if environmental events like drought stop soil's biological processes. There is also a limit to how much carbon can be stored in soils as organic matter.

But inorganic soil carbon is more permanent. For farms, carbon can be intentionally stored in an inorganic form through a process called enhanced rock weathering (ERW) – or, basically just spreading dust from crushed rock on a field.

COURTESY UNDO CARBON

UNDO Carbon has partnered with Canadian Wollastonite, a company based in Kingston, Ont., to supply crushed wollastonite to farms for free and sells credits linked to the expected stored carbon to companies seeking to offset their emissions.

Speeding up the process

ERW accelerates a natural process of rock erosion that begins when rain water interacts with carbon dioxide to form carbonic acid, which binds to eroding rock particles as the rain falls on the earth's surface. That carbon stays stuck to the rock as it slowly breaks down into sand and erodes away. The eroded rock eventually gets washed into rivers and eventually settles on the ocean floor, where the carbon attached to the eroded rock stays removed from the atmosphere for thousands of years. This process happens too slowly under natural circumstances, so ERW speeds it up by crushing up the rock much faster than it could possible erode otherwise.

Different kinds of rock can be better or worse options for inorganic carbon storage, but some kinds – like wollastonite – are being mined right here in Canada, including in Quebec.

One organization currently facilitating ERW in the country is UNDO Carbon, which supplies crushed wollastonite to farms for free (the farmer only pays for hauling the rock to the farm) and sells credits linked to the expected stored carbon to companies seeking to offset their emissions. UNDO partners with Kingston-based mine Canadian Wollastonite to source the crushed rock.

Some companies that UNDO has worked with to support ERW in Canada include Microsoft and Barclays.

According to some calculations, one tonne of carbon is removed for every 1.6 tonnes of wollastonite, and most farmers in the program apply an average of two to four tonnes of wollastonite per acre each year. There is some net loss of carbon from emissions generated during mining, hauling and spreading, but UNDO reports that every 100 tonnes of carbon dioxide removed from spreading of wollastonite results in less than 10 tonnes of the greenhouse gas being "emitted in the process of getting it from mine to farm."

Added benefits for farms

In addition to the carbon storage, UNDO says the crushed rock also carries side benefits for farmers by balancing pH in place of lime and by providing silica to crops.

UNDO Carbon's Canadian operations are currently focused in Ontario and do not extend into Quebec, though the organization says it would like to begin spreading in this province as well. But in past years, another company – Vertical Exploration, a junior mining company based in Vancouver with operations located in the Lac St. Jean region – is exploring options to use wollastonite from its St. Onge wollastonite deposit for carbon removal.

In January, it extended an exclusivity agreement with an undisclosed international entity to pursue that goal. And just this past August, the mining company announced it had received a five-year permit for its branded Global Wollastonite Agricultural Calcium Silicate product and was in a position to seek orders.

Vertical Exploration had also finalized an initial offtake sales agreement with a local Lac St. Jean farmer and entrepreneur for a sale of up to 69 tonnes of wollastonite.

Trends in agriculture

DENISE LEBLANC/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

The fall is that time of year that is busy on the farm, but it also provides the opportunity to reflect on all that has happened in the past year.

An old farmer's thoughts as we mark another fall

Chris Judd
The Advocate

As the nights get colder, the kids are back to school or far away at college. Everybody that is still with us has celebrated another birthday and we reminisce about our old friends who have left us this year.

Whether they died with millions in the bank or not is not what we remember. We remember what they left behind – a hard-working honest family, how they helped people out when tough times surrounded them, or how they treated their employees.

Even though we had a great summer for vacationing and travelling, when we received a couple of greatly needed rains at the end of a very dry August and September, farmers were thankful it greened up the brown pastures and helping the corn crop "plump up."

Yields are down

Most crops were below normal in yield this year. But most farmers have learned their lesson during past dry years and had stored an extra barn full of hay, and an extra bunk full of silage. They always use up the feed left over from last year first so it never gets too old or loses too much feed value.

A dry summer always drives feed prices higher, and that, in turn, causes all our food prices to go even higher. Farmers are consumers, too. And even though some of them have a garden, a few fruit trees, their own beef, pork or milk, when we buy groceries, we see it is too expensive.

When we drive around the country, we see many fields of corn that have already turned brown due to the lack of rain or an early frost. But many farmers were surprised at how much moisture was still in that corn. Corn is an amazing crop and even when the plant is brown and looks dead, immature corn stocks are still trying to suck water from that dry-looking soil.

Farmers who have kids in 4-H are just coming through a very busy, exciting time when those kids are preparing and showing 4-H projects at one or more fall fairs. Whether the project is a chicken, rabbit, goat, sheep, horse, beef or dairy animal, this is a fast-learning experience for the kids involved when they help each other to clip, groom, train and show the animal to its finest. When we watch the shows, the judges explain to the kids and the audience why one animal is placed higher than the next. Whether it's a five-year-old first time "pee-wee" show person or a 20-year-old winner, everyone learns.

Planning for year to come

Farmers are also leaders in the fight against global warming. They don't leave a field barren for the winter, but plant a cover crop after harvest. This crop will germinate and prevent wind and water erosion that often occurs in fall and spring when the fields are left bare all winter. If that crop is fall wheat, it can be the first harvested crop the following fall. If it is some other cover crop, it can be tilled into the ground in spring, leaving more organic matter and fertility in the soil.

If manure is applied to corn stocks left in the field after combining, and the field is lightly tilled, the manure supplies organic matter and fertilizer which the microbes in the soil will break down. This will add both organic matter and fertility for next year.

Fall is a very busy time on farms – getting the buildings ready for winter, the antifreeze levels checked in all vehicles, winter tires installed, gardens harvested, putting plastic silo-wrap on haylage and corn silage. Correct sealing of silages can save as much as 50 per cent of the feed value.

Prepare for the cold

Farmers must make sure there is "winter fuel" in all diesel engine tanks to avoid motors that just don't start on cold days. Farm machinery, cars and trucks used in winter must be changed to winter-grade oil. Animal feed rations must be adjusted for energy to compensate for animals that live in the open or in buildings that are below 42 degrees Fahrenheit. Water bowels and pumps must be prepared for those below-freezing temperatures. A supply of salt and sand must be ready to sand the yard for the milk truck to get to the barn. Make sure the snow blower is ready and not sitting where it could be covered with a snow drift in the first snowstorm.

News

Cull at B.C. ostrich farm leads to bizarre controversies

Attempted arson, RCMP standoffs and Indigenous impersonation all part of avian flu case

Andrew McClelland
The Advocate

JENNIFER BLAIR/FACEBOOK

Universal Ostrich Farms owners Dave Bilinski and Karen Espersen speak with RCMP officers in a photo posted to the "Universal Ostrich Farms" Facebook Group on Oct.14. As of that date, the group had 64,000 followers.

A controversy playing out at a B.C. ostrich farm has reached new heights as the Supreme Court of Canada issued a temporary stay of an order to kill more than 300 birds suspected of carrying avian flu at Universal Ostrich Farms in Edgewood, 95 kilometres east of Kelowna.

On Sept. 24, as the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) was setting up to euthanize the remaining birds in the flock – and as hundreds of protesters and RCMP officers surrounded the farm – the Supreme Court said it would allow farm owners to appeal the decision to cull the ostrich herd.

The controversy has brought a mix of issues related to animal rights, perceived government overreach and the public's understanding of agricultural safety issues to the media in recent months.

Farm did not report flu

As of December 2024, farm owners Dave Bilinski and Karen Espersen had a flock of 450 ostriches. Later that month, a flock of wild ducks landed in the ostriches' open-air enclosure. In the days and weeks that followed, 69 of the farm's youngest birds died after contracting a respiratory infection.

According to the CFIA, the farm did not report these deaths. The agency was tipped off by an anonymous source, after which CFIA imposed a quarantine order and visited the farm to collect samples from two of the dead birds.

On Dec. 31, 2024, Universal was told the tests for avian flu were positive, and an order to cull the remaining flock was issued.

The CFIA follows guidelines set by the World Organization for Animal Health for culling flocks in which H5N1 has been detected. In cases of infected ostriches, compensation of $3,000 per bird is granted to the farm business. However, if the CFIA is called upon to carry out the cull, that compensation may be withheld.

Universal Ostrich Farms managed to stave off the imposed cull through a court injunction that allowed the owners and the CFIA to make their case before a federal judge in April 2025.

Herd immunity

In the meantime, as no further deaths occurred in the flock, Universal's employees and hundreds of B.C. residents took to social media to argue that the remaining birds had attained herd immunity and should be allowed to live.

"We can prove to you we pose no public health and safety risk," Katie Pasitney, daughter of farm co-owner Karen Espersen, said in an interview with the CBC.

"There's a family sitting here trying to do the right thing. We put our feet on the ground every morning. We pray, we open our hearts that there's hope that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency would revisit their (decision.)"

Some reports state that up to 200 protesters have been seen gathered at Universal, with many camping out and live-streaming footage of the birds exhibiting normal, healthy behaviour. They argue that allowing the ostriches to live would let them be studied by researchers and further the fight against H5N1.

But the CFIA has refused to retest the remaining birds, citing that any further testing would be inconclusive.

Angela Rasmussen, a professor and researcher of virology at the University of Saskatchewan, said even if the farm's surviving birds were tested, older ostriches often do not develop antibodies against viruses like avian flu. Therefore, any further testing of the flock could not reliably determine whether or not the birds have immunity to H5N1.

"Simply having antibodies does not guarantee immunity to H5N1," Rasmussen said.

RFK and Dr. Oz weigh in

The controversy has rocked the small town of Edgewood, an unincorporated community with a population of 235 residents.

On Sept. 22, the farm's neighbour, a woman in her early 70s, spotted a person pouring gasoline on her home. When confronted, the suspect poured gasoline on her during the ensuing scuffle. Police arrested the suspect, who was later released with the promise not to return to the area.

In August, U.S. Medicare administrator (and TV personality) Dr. Mehmet Oz wrote a letter to Prime Minister Mark Carney requesting special dispensation to take the nearly 400 ostriches and house them at his farm in Florida. In a post on X, U.S. Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. stated that he had met with Canadian health officials about sparing the flock at Universal.

In early October, CBC Indigenous was made aware of a letter claiming to be from the "Sewepemc Signatory Tribe" addressed to the RCMP and the CFIA, warning all government agencies that Universal Ostrich Farms' property "lies within the territorial boundaries of the Secwepemc and Syilx Tribal people," and is "now under the protection of said tribes."

On Oct. 7, the Chiefs Executive Council of the Syilx Okanagan Nation made a statement to media that it could "confirm definitively that (the letter) was not issued by our Nation."

Three different creditors of Universal Ostrich Farms have made attempts to garnishee the CFIA for any compensation that could go to the farm business if the federal agency proceeds with the cull.

The Supreme Court says it is examining the case "on an expedited basis."

Editorial

PATRICKLAUZON PHOTOGRAPHE/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Legault's most important challenge when it comes to agriculture: bringing levels of support in line with the true needs of the farming world.

Martin Caron
UPA President

Premier must use influence for positive change

And in farming sector, we need to start seeing results

Premier François Legault delivered his opening speech before a new session of Quebec's National Assembly on Sept. 30. In it, he spoke about the priorities identified in the recent cabinet shuffle: the economy, security, efficiency and identity.

As I mentioned at the time, these priorities mesh with the government's most important challenge when it comes to agriculture: bringing levels of support in line with the true needs of the farming world. I am, of course, referring to funding for policies and programs, including ones to address agri-environmental issues and climate-change adaptation, as well as compensation for the exorbitant amounts of money that have been sucked out of the agriculture sector through carbon pricing. We will need to see appropriate results in short order.

Results are also needed given the scrapping of Bill 97, which would have overhauled the province's forestry system.

Keep key improvements

With respect to forestry, the bill had proposed two key advances that should be retained. The first is standardizing regulations to protect forest cover in private forests across regional county municipalities, or MRCs. The second is creating a mechanism for the minister to reduce the volume of timber harvested from public forests should a disturbance in private forests destroy forest ranges for any reason.

Concerning maple production, a new bill would still need to include provisions to develop production in private forests. It would also need to preserve the minister's latitude in addressing operational problems encountered by maple producers, like installing equipment in sugar bushes.

Maple sector concerns

Like other public forest users, maple producers want a consultation mechanism that will allow them to align their activities and lend voice to organizations affected by forest land management and planning.

Turning now to efficiency, Legault will be calling on ministers and organizations to do away with the "bureaucratic straitjacket" and slash red tape. This is a laudable aim. The agriculture sector has for years been critical of the administrative and regulatory burdens it faces, which undermine producers' professionalism and hold back businesses.

The government's timelines and requirements in the area of watercourse management are reaching the point where they can no longer be ignored, as various municipalities can attest.

"Modernizing" the union system in the way the premier hopes to do is, however, ill advised. The climate of confrontation that would result would divert attention from genuine priorities – economic ones, in this case. Producers care about things like ensuring their businesses are profitable and transferrable. They don't have time for debates that sow division as they go about their day-to-day business.

Support growth areas

Legault wants to create jobs, support businesses, and push economic and strategic projects forward. Agriculture and forestry are growth sectors. They have the potential to create thousands of jobs, develop land and sustainably feed consumers at home and away.

Last year, the premier was sympathetic to the mobilization of producers. Now, 12 months before the next provincial general election, we need to see concrete results quickly. Legault needs to use his influence for good again.

News

COURTESY TIKTOK

Prime Minister Mark Carney and U.S. President Donald Trump held a press conference in Washington on Oct. 7. When asked if the U.S. would sign a trade deal with Canada that did not include a revision to Canada's supply-managed sectors, Trump responded: "Dairy – it's gonna include everything."

TRADE: Canadian officials stick to pledge to keep supply management off table

From Page 1

More, a spokesperson from the office of Dominic Leblanc, minister for Canada-U.S. Trade, repeated the government's assurance to protect supply-managed industries in an interview with *The Globe*, stating: "Canada's supply-management system will never be on the table."

U.S. 'kings of getting screwed'

Much of the debate over access to dairy markets in Canada is related to tariff rate quotas, which allow certain amount of dairy volumes to come into Canada at lower duty levels.

The U.S. filed a dispute settlement complaint against Canada under CUSMA in January 2023, alleging Canada's dairy tariff rate quota measures violated the agreement by unfairly restricting market access for U.S. dairy producers. A panel at the CUSMA later ruled in Canada's favour.

But Trump's recent tariff impositions and rhetoric indicate that the U.S. president is gunning for greater access to foreign markets, which could cause major hurdles when the review for CUSMA comes up in 2026.

"Of all countries, we're the kings of getting screwed by tariffs," said Trump at the Oct. 7 press conference, seated beside Carney. "I'm not talking about with Canada, but other countries, too."

Rumour vs. legislation

In June, the House of Commons unanimously passed a bill aimed at protecting supply management in future trade negations.

Bill C-202 limits Canada's ability to make trade concessions impacting supply-managed industries, like the milk, egg and poultry sectors. Introduced by Bloc Québécois leader Yves-François Blanchet, the bill has been praised by dairy groups such as the Dairy Farmers of Canada and criticized by sectors whose products are largely export-driven, saying it leaves Ottawa with little power at international negotiating tables.

Bill C-202 received royal assent in June, meaning it will soon become Canadian law.

Dairy Farmers of Canada has stated that it has all indications that the Canadian government will stand by its official position on supply management.

"It remains DFC's expectation that no further concessions will be made to supply management," said the national policy and lobbying group, according to media reports.

CUSMA's review is slated to begin on July 1, 2026. The main purpose of the review is to determine if Canada, the U.S. and Mexico wish to extend the deal for another 16 years beyond the current 2036 expiry date.

FACEBOOK

Pierre-Luc Parent was a father of two. He worked at Soya Rive-Nord in Ste. Élisabeth in the Lanaudière region, which produces extruded soybean meal and soybean oil.

38-year-old killed in fall from silo

Frederic Serre
The Advocate

Quebec's employment, health and safety board, police and the coroner are investigating an incident at a farm in the Lanaudière region on the morning of Oct. 8 that claimed the life of a young father of two – a death that has shaken the farming community in that region.

According to initial reports by the Sûreté du Québec, Pierre-Luc Parent, 38, fell off a silo at the Soya Rive-Nord farm located on Rang de la Rivière Nord in Ste. Élisabeth at about 11 a.m. Parent was a resident of the nearby town of St. Gabriel de Brandon

"A farm worker had fallen from a considerable height while climbing a silo," the SQ statement read. "The man was unconscious and was unfortunately pronounced dead by a doctor."

Paramedics had been called to the scene and attempted to revive the victim.

Parent was co-owner of the family farm, which produces extruded soybean meal and soybean oil for animal consumption.

His death has shaken the tight farming communities of Ste. Élizabeth and St. Gabriel de Brandon, and the Parent family in particular, with his sister, Maude, posting a tribute the day after the tragedy on her Facebook page.

Parent was described by his sister as "always smiling, positive, generous, and so much more."

"On Oct. 8, two wonderful little girls lost their dad, and let's face it, everyone would have wanted a dad like you," she wrote. "A woman lost the love of her life. My God, how he loved his (spouse) Gaby. I will never thank you enough for making her so happy. A mother lost her only son, her darling, as my sister and I used to say. He was the wisest of the three of us. A parent should never have to say goodbye to their child."

"An accident happens so quickly, a world collapses so quickly. Tell your loved ones you love them as many times as you can because it may be the last time, and you never know when it will happen."

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

It's time to renew your membership. Reminder cards will not be mailed out. So we are asking that you clip out the form below. Fill it out and send your cheque in the amount indicated and mail it in. **We are counting on your support.** Show your pride in being part of Quebec's English-speaking community. **It only cost $68.99**.

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

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

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

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

Gregory Elliot, Howick
Bevin Boyd, Arundel
Carolyn Dagenais, Shefford
Brian Wallace, St. Bernard de Lacolle
James Allen Dymond, Dunham
Wesley Larocque, Sutton
Nigel Goodall, Glen Sutton

The Forum Report

Right calf care can produce zero losses, with zero treatments

Andrew McClelland
The Advocate

Jodi Wallace knows all about the industry standards for calf mortality and sickness rates. She's a sixth-generation dairy producer – and a practicing veterinarian since 2002.

But she wants her farm and her clients' farms to be better than the industry standards.

"The average industry standard mortality rate in calves in five per cent," explained Wallace in a QFA videoconference held on Oct. 1. "But I don't want you guys to be standard. If you want to be average, do average things. But if you want to be exceptional, you have to be better than the average."

Wallace's farm and career are exemplary at being much better than average. In 2023, she was named "Bovine Practitioner of the Year" by the American Association of Bovine Practitioners. She is the second Canadian woman to win the award and holds the distinction of being the first recipient from Quebec.

COURTESY: JODI WALLACE

Veterinarian and farmer Jodi Wallace was named "Bovine Practitioner of the Year" by the American Association of Bovine Practitioners at their annual conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 2023, becoming the Canadian and only Quebecer to receive the award. At Wallace's own farm, cow pens are built to include calving corners; the blind end at the right (with wood panels) provides a sense of security and reduces stress during calving.

Setting a high bar

Much of the credit for the award was due to Wallace's accomplishment of attaining what she's dubbed "zero-zero calf care"– raising calves with zero treatments and zero death loss.

Wallace, along with her husband, Mark Anderson, their four children, and brother-in law, own and operate their farm, Silverstream Holsteins in Howick, in the Châteauguay Valley, southwest of Montreal. Their operation boasts 100 cows, producing an average yield of 13,000 kilograms. It was there that Wallace and her family first achieved a "zero-zero" calf care streak four years running.

"It's not rocket science," Wallace said. "It's just about doing the basics right – and being consistent throughout."

Getting a good start

The first pillar of keeping healthy calves, she said, is colostrum quality. Making sure its quality, quantity, timing and cleanliness are at their best ensures a healthy calf, as most health problems can be traced back to the first 24 hours of a calf's life.

"Colostrum should be reading over 24 per cent in the Brix (refractometer)," she said. "You want that calf to be taking in 10 per cent of its birthweight. You want it in as fast as possible, and it needs to be clean."

When it comes to keeping cows healthy and preventing any infection that can lead to illness, cleanliness is at the top of the list. Calving areas need to be kept clean, and make things easy on yourself by ensuring a sink and hot water tank are close to the calving area and calf pens.

"Hygiene and cleanliness at this stage are critical," Wallace explained. "Not only in colostrum, but in the whole calving environment, dry cow area – everything."

Reducing stress in dry cows and calves is another pillar of Wallace's philosophy. That means avoiding in utero stress, heat stress and stress during calving. Silverstream Holsteins built a new dry cow barn in 2020 that put calving corners inside their dry cow pens. The calving corners have a blind end with wood panels that provide a sense of security.

Proper setup

"The idea is that it mimics nature," Wallace explained.

"In her mind, she's hiding," she said of the cow. "So she feels safe. She can see if something's coming and she can beeline out of there. But we also don't have to go to the back 40 to pull her out of the bush."

All cows are dried off together and stay in a closed group with none added or mixed from other groups, which also reduces stress.

Clean air is also key to limiting the chances of calves contracting pneumonia and other ailments.

"If you can have an open front and open back, you'll get better air circulation, better movement, you can really dilute those microbes in the pen," Wallace explained, noting that positive pressure ventilation tubes mounted from the ceiling can bring in fresh air from outside without creating a draught at calf-level.

Protect the immunity system

Finally, vaccines will help the calf be protected from disease. Preparing the calf's – and the herd's – immune system to be able to withstand bacterial viruses already present in the environment is key to giving her the best chance at optimal health.

For Wallace, the key to zero-zero calf care is consistency and diligence. Keeping cows fed, calm, comfortable and healthy will allow them to enter the rigours of milk production confidently. It's a job that's a lot like parenting when you think about it.

"These calves are your babies. You're responsible for getting them from baby calf to a heifer in the milk production line. But there's nothing more rewarding than watching your little kids grow up to be productive young adults."

News

BEATRICE FOORD-ST-LAURENT/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

The number of cows in Canada increased in the first half of 2025, reversing a four-year trend, according to the latest figures from Statistics Canada.

Number of cows in Canada jumps, reversing trend

Brenda O'Farrell
The Advocate

The number of cattle in Canada is on the rise, a reverse of a four-year trend, according to the latest figures released by Statistics Canada.

As of July 1, there were 11.9 million head of cattle on Canadian farms, StatsCan figures released at the end of August show. That represents a 0.8-per-cent increase over last year's figures.

The jump in the number of cattle is due to a drop in the slaughter rate, which fell by 5 per cent compared with last year, hitting 1.6 million head from January to June of 2025.

StatsCan said producers held on to 2 per cent more beef heifers for breeding, 0.5 per cent more bulls and 0.4 per cent more beef cows.

The inventory of dairy heifers also increased by half a percentage point, contributing to a 0.4-per-cent increase in the number of dairy cows in the country.

Exports of live cattle and calves in the first six months of 2025 dropped by 390,400 head compared with the same period last year, a decrease of 2.7 per cent.

Number of hogs down

The number of hogs on Canadian farms dropped in the first half of this year.

Figures show there were 13.8 million hogs on Canadian farms as of July 1, a drop of 1.3 per cent compared with 2024.

Despite the drop, Quebec maintained its status as the province with the most hogs.

Bucking the trend were producers in Ontario, where the overall size of the hog herd grew slightly.

There were 1.2 million sows in the country on July 1. And the pig crop for the first six months of this year increased by 1.4 per cent compared with last year, to hit 15.1 million.

Like cattle, the export of live hogs dropped during the period of January to the end of June in 2025 compared to the same six months in 2024, slipping 1 per cent to 3.5 million head.

Meanwhile, the total number of hogs that were slaughtered increased by 3.3 per cent to reach 11 million head. According to StatsCan, this jump was supported by a strong demand for pork exports.

Number of sheep up slightly

The number of sheep and lambs in Canada in the first half of this year increased by 1 per cent to hit 1 million head, with Ontario having the largest slice of that production, followed closely by Alberta and Quebec. Although, Alberta saw the size of its overall herd drop slightly.

The sheep breeding herd hit 627,000 on July 1, StatsCan figures show, an increase of just 0.1 per cent. This is the result of an increase in the number of rams, which was up 1.7 per cent, and replacement lambs, up 1.5 per cent, offsetting a drop in the number of ewes, which was trimmed by 0.2 per cent.

The number of lambs sent to market was up 2.4 per cent in the first six months of the year, hitting a total of 410,000.

The export of live sheep and lambs fell a dramatic 82.3 per cent to only 1,100.

News

Open-fire ban extended in five regions of province

Frederic Serre
The Advocate

The autumn weather may be getting colder, but the Quebec government is continuing to impose strict regulations on the prohibition of open fires in or near certain forests in designated areas across the province – a prohibition set as of Oct. 1 in collaboration with the Société de protection des forêts contre le feu (SOPFEU).

Quebec's Ministère de la Sécurité publique made the announcement Sept. 30, the same day it said there were seven active fires raging across the province. The number jumped to 12 as of Oct. 9. Since the start of the protection season, 372 forest fires have affected 1,053 hectares, the ministry said, adding that the average for the last 10 years at the same date is 438 fires for an area of 118,663 hectares.

"The aim of this ban is to limit the risk of forest fires," a statement from the Sécurité publique said. "Everyone's cooperation is essential. Consequently, it is forbidden to set or maintain an open fire or to be in the vicinity of such an active fire."

Under section 155.1 of the *Fire Safety Act*, anyone who contravenes an order prohibiting the lighting of open fires in or near a forest, or any other measure imposed by the government, is liable to a fine in addition to the costs incurred.

Areas affected by the fire ban include:

- **Abitibi-Témiscamingue:** Témiscamingue, Rouyn-Noranda, Abitibi-Ouest, Abitibi, La Vallée-de-l'Or.
- **Outaouais:** Papineau, Gatineau, Les Collines-de-l'Outaouais, La Vallée-de-la-Gatineau, Pontiac.
- **Laurentides:** Deux-Montagnes, Thérèse-De Blainville, Mirabel, La Rivière-du-Nord, Argenteuil, Les Pays-d'en-Haut, Les Laurentides, Antoine-Labelle.
- **Lanaudière:** D'Autray, L'Assomption, Joliette, Matawinie, Montcalm, Les Moulins.
- **Montérégie:** Vaudreuil-Soulanges.

DICKINSON: Canada has to market national food brand

From Page 1

Dickinson has been investing in the agri-food sector for about a decade, with her company pumping about $170 million into a variety of projects. She also started the first not-for-profit accelerator to help emerging companies in the food, beverage, and health and wellness spaces.

Her experience has opened her eyes to what she calls a "lack of attention" on farm production and the agri-food sector in this country.

And that observation was underlined in a recent trip to Asia, where she found governments and companies scrambling to secure safe and reliable food supply lines.

"Canada should naturally be their first call," she wrote in *The Globe and Mail*. "We have the land, water, reputation and safety standards to feed billions. Yet, we're barely noticed. We're seen as a bulk commodity supplier at best, while markets across the Pacific sit wide open."

Canada's challenge, she said, is to transition its food sector from being commodity focused to more consumer focused.

"All the money is in the commercialization of our commodities," she said in an interview.

"There is a lot of capital and economies of value that is being derived from the producers who grow our grains, crops, etc. – I am not at all minimizing that. But what we do is ship those commodities to markets. They productize it and we buy them back.

"And when we buy them back, we're paying an incredibly high price for that."

That is where the Canadian food sector has to expand and create its own national brand, so that it gets recognized in markets around the world, she said.

"Other countries are selling more than food, they're selling trust. New Zealand sells 'New Zealand milk.' Australia sells 'Australian beef and beef products.' Their national brands travel with every product. Canada hasn't built that brand. Our food is respected but not recognized," she said.

The Asian market is waiting for Canada, she said. It is actively searching for safe, quality food from a source it can trust. And Canada has largely ignore it because it has been complacent and has opted to focus its exports on the U.S.

But to shift, the sector has to actively create a national brand. Just how to do that has already been figured out. It simply hasn't been acted on.

"There has been a lot of work done, whether it's through groups coming together at roundtables, whether it's through consultation with the industry, whether it's through hiring consultants who come in and help us understand it," she said at the CAPI forum in Ottawa.

"Over decades, the same, exact list of things that have to be done for the sector to be able to grow are brought forward, and nothing's been acted on."

That has to change. And change quickly.

"The threat to us by not focusing on it is enormous," she said.

The Resourceful Naturalist

In the bird world, the home nest is not always occupant's castle

Paul J. Hetzler
ISA Certified Arborist

AGNIESZKA BACAL/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

The brown-headed cowbird is known to drop its eggs in another bird's nest, and leaving the rearing of young to others.

The award-winning 2019 film *Parasite* depicts a wealthy family that gets duped into hiring four members of a ne'er-do-well family who pose as seasoned domestic help. The imposters steal from the host family and wind up laying waste to their peaceful existence. But that's nothing compared with what happens in real life every spring.

In the avian world, there's a group of species known as brood parasites. It seems these characters never got the memo on how to make nests, incubate eggs and feed babies like normal birds do. Instead, the females sneak around and lay eggs, one at a time, in the nests of honest, hard-working birds. And for the most part, the ruse works – other bird-parents raise these "nest parasites" as their own, often at the expense of their biological offspring. In the U.S., at least 200 different host species are thus defrauded each nesting season.

The main culprit is the brown-headed cowbird, a small (6-8 inches long), innocuous-looking bird with a sparrow-like bill. They favour open grasslands where livestock hooves kick up bugs and worms that cowbirds can feed on, but they have adapted to urban and suburban conditions as well. Males are glossy black with a light brown head, while females are dappled brown, perfect camouflage for skulking around their neighbours' abodes. Native to all lower 48 states, the cowbird is a type of obligate brood parasite, meaning it can only reproduce by holding other bird families hostage to its babies.

One of the reasons cowbirds get away with their theft-of-services con is that the colour of their eggs, white to off-white, with brown to grey spots or streaks, is similar to that of many other species' eggs. Size doesn't always match, as cowbird eggs are bigger than many host species eggs. Numbers may not add up either, as female cowbirds will kick out (or eat) some of the host's eggs if the nest is crowded. A few host species, like the yellow warbler, can recognize cowbird eggs and will eject them or build a new nest on top of them. In the end, though, host parents usually accept the odd-egg-out as one of their own.

In some cases it may be true that hosts really don't notice the "ugly duckling" in their nest, but there's a darker reason so many species blithely raise the cowbirds' cast-away brats. Cowbirds sometimes take revenge on birds that reject their eggs by destroying the would-be host's eggs or nestlings while the adults are gone (this can also result when well-meaning people identify and remove cowbird eggs from songbird nests). By adopting the cowbird's egg, and thus avoiding a Mafia-style punishment, the host parents at least have a chance to successfully rear a few of their own chicks.

Because cowbird eggs have a shorter incubation period than most songbirds' eggs do, they're usually the first to hatch. In addition, cowbird chicks grow faster than the young of many other species, meaning they hog the lion's share of food their foster-parents bring home. Since cowbirds are native, and their parasitic proclivities are nothing new, they don't seem to hurt the breeding success of host species in a significant way.

One might assume cowbirds are genetically lazy to have hatched such a breeding plan, but there's a better explanation. It's believed they historically followed bison herds as they ranged across the prairies. In the disturbed soil left behind as bison passed, cowbirds would have found plenty of grass seeds and insects to eat. Over time, they may have adopted their egg-abandonment method because they had to move with the herds. On the other hand, cowbirds might've been free to follow bison due to the fact their strategy was already in play (which suggests to me they might be innate slackers).

We have two more bird species that leave eggs in other nests. Fortunately, they are facultative brood parasites, which means they sometimes offload their eggs onto others, but for the most part they make nests and raise their own young. Maybe parasitizing nests is just a hobby for them.

Found as far west as eastern Wyoming, black-billed cuckoos also breed in the Plains states, Great Lakes region, as well as the Northeast. They're reclusive, preferring dense forests and brush in which to nest. You're more likely to hear, rather than see, a cuckoo. Their song, while not ornate, is unmistakable, a low series of staccato notes that sound like "cuckoo." No surprise there. Scrabble players might want to take note: black-billed cuckoos have zygodactyl feet, defined by two toes that point forward and two that point backward.

The yellow-billed cuckoo is our other part-time brood parasite. Its breeding range is from southern Canada down to Mexico, and from the Dakotas east to the Atlantic. They're most abundant in Texas and Oklahoma, but also common throughout the Southeast. Yellow-billed cuckoos never learned how to say "cuckoo," but they sound a bit like they're trying to get the hang of it.

Yellow-billed and black-billed cuckoos are among the few birds that like to eat hairy caterpillars, like the destructive tent caterpillars and spongy moth (formerly Gypsy moth) caterpillars. These pests can entirely defoliate trees, weakening and sometimes killing them. Cuckoos are often abundant during outbreaks of these caterpillars, and help to reduce their numbers.

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

SPONSORED CONTENT

Farm worker training impacts well-being, performance

Omar Sandoval
Adviser Lactanet

In the dairy sector, the demand for temporary foreign workers is increasing. According to the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council forecasts, the labour shortage problems in the industry are expected to persist or even increase in the coming years. Training and onboarding of new employees is crucial to their success and to reduce stress and possibilities of failure for employers and employees. The reality on the ground here in Canada is consistent with the results of recent North American studies. This makes it possible to identify clear solutions and to implement employee integration and retention strategies that pay off.

Employees and anxiety

The structure of dairy farms is changing, and the challenge of managing employees is becoming a reality and a source of anxiety for many. Recent research conducted in Western Canada and Ontario has revealed a notable trend: farmers' anxiety seems to increase with the number of employees and the presence of non-family employees. This resonates with the growing concern for the well-being of Canadian dairy farmers.

Impact of employee training

Are the training programs cost-effective and do they improve herd health and milk quality?

A recent American study suggests that they do. The study involved 112 workers on 16 dairy farms in Michigan and Ohio. The authors visited each farm three times to assess the impact of the trainings on workers' understanding of milking routine, milking behaviours and the subsequent effects on milk quality and udder health.

One of the visits served to provide training on milk quality and milking protocols.

The dairy farms chosen for the study had to have a conventional milking system and the farm workers had to have no recent training on milk quality or milking protocols. Most participants were foreign workers (61.1%), 70 per cent of whom had less than one year of experience.

In addition, 74.7 per cent of the participants spoke Spanish, allowing language barriers to be considered in training programs as the diversity of educational pathways among workers also presents a challenge for educators when creating training content for all participants.

Study results

Following the training, the knowledge of the milking routine increased from 49.3 per cent to 67.6 per cent. Based on parlour evaluations, the contact time of the disinfectant in pre-milking routine increased by nine seconds per cow. The percentage of milkings with inadequate preparation time decreased from 69 per cent (pre-training) to 48 per cent (post-training). The proportion of insufficient coverage with the post-milking teat dip decreased from 9.8 per cent (77 of 782) pre-training to 5.9 per cent (34 of 572) post-training. And the SCC at the bulk tank stopped increasing.

Overall, the results suggest that there was an improvement in milking routine, mastitis identification and milk quality.

Finally, in terms of the atmosphere within the teams, the training promoted greater satisfaction and stimulated productive discussions and behavioural changes.

Conclusions

Challenges faced by producers, like stress and financial management, highlight the need to provide them with tailored support and resources to maintain their well-being and overall quality of life.

On-farm practical training provides a good foundation for mastitis prevention, to increase operational performance, engagement, to build confidence, and to help your staff develop their independence and take responsibility.

Studies highlight the positive impact of training programs on various aspects of dairy farm operations, and the cost-effectiveness of these programs for producers.

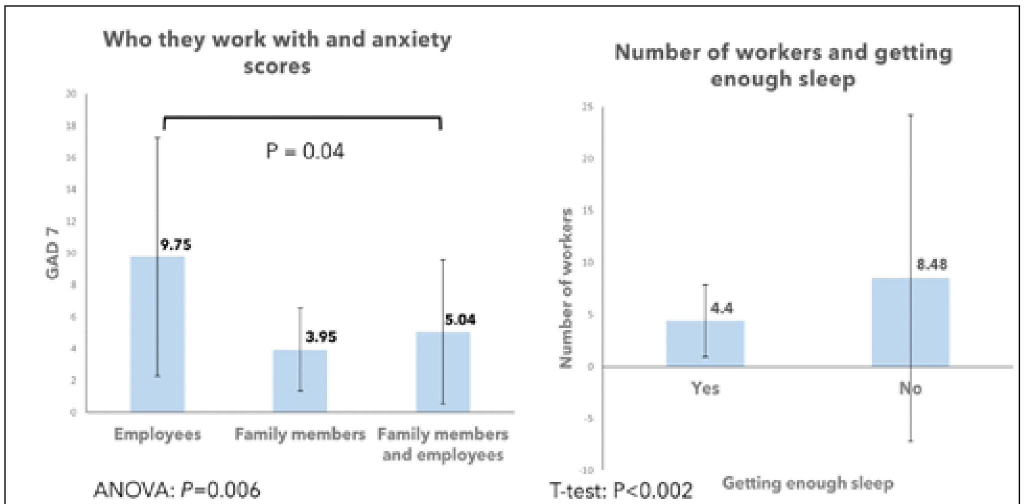
The main objective of training programs is to acquire knowledge and skills to prevent or reduce the risk of mastitis and associated economic losses before they occur; let us remember that in Canada, the cost of mastitis, taking into account the cost of treatment, the impact of the disease on milk production, the reduction in fertility and the risk of culling the animal, is in the range of $735 to $1,130 less in profit per case of mastitis.

PARILOV/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Studies highlight positive impact of training programs on dairy farm operations.

Research also highlights the importance of training to foster teamwork, communication and worker satisfaction that will ultimately lead to improved decision-making and overall farm management.

Given the central role of farm workers in maintaining optimal levels of food safety, milk quality and animal health, the success and profitability of dairy farms is highly dependent on their knowledge, skills and attitudes.



Source: Tambadou, 2024

Source: Zelmar et al. 2025.

Grains

U.S. government shutdown impacting grain market

Ramzy Yelda
Senior Market Analyst
Producteurs de grains du Québec

The ongoing U.S. government shutdown is having multiple impacts, including on the grain market.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture publishes multiple analytical reports that deal with the U.S. and world grain markets, including the weekly look at crop progress and grain export sales. The first one can be substituted to some extent by the private sector assessing the crop condition and harvest progress. As for the export sales, there is no other source. If it is not produced, everybody is left in the dark. It is a reminder that the United States is the only country canvassing and publishing this critical sales information. All the other governments publish only past export data.

The monthly World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates is another extremely valuable tool that is no longer available. The USDA publishes world supply and demand data for all the major grains, exporters and importers. Once again, the USDA is the only public organization doing this monumental analytical work and publishing it.

With the grain markets all operating normally despite the shutdown, one could argue that it is business as usual. It is, to some extent. Buyers and sellers rely on the information available. With the shutdown, the amount and quality of the information sustaining the markets is much more limited. Hence, world grain markets are operating with less transparency, which may increase price volatility should the supply or demand side suddenly changes.

Farmers open their doors for *Portes ouvertes Mangeons* local event

The Union des producteurs agricoles held its *Portes ouvertes Mangeons* local event on Sept. 7, with the Producteurs de grains du Québec welcoming visitors to two locations.

The *Caravane des grains* visited Ferme Valsy in St. Édouard de Fabre, in the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region, while the PGQ communications team travelled to Ferme-école MASKITA of the *Institut de technologie agroalimentaire du Québec* (ITAQ), in St. Hyacinthe.

The PGQ would like to thank Abitibi-Témiscamingue syndicate members for their time and involvement during the day.

Zoom fall season launch

On Sept. 16, the PGQ held the second edition of its Zoom fall season launch. Around 60 people attended the virtual information session. In addition to news on hot topics, participants heard two specialized presentations.

The first, given by biomonitoring researcher for CÉROM Julien Saguez, focused on the various pest detection tools for field crops.

The second presentation was on how *Quebec's Engineers Act* applies to agricultural projects. It was given by engineer Julie Blanchard, a consultant with the *Ordre des ingénieurs du Québec*, and lawyer Patrick Marcoux.

This new annual event is a great opportunity for grain producers across Quebec to get informed, ask questions, and leave better equipped for the coming season.

Market webinar

The PGQ's market information service (SIM) held a market webinar on Sept. 23. In the context of tariff-related uncertainties, the objective was to paint a realistic picture of the grain market by taking into account data from the most recent USDA and Statistics Canada reports.

If you were unable to attend, you can watch it on the PGQ website at pgq.ca/producteurs/webinaires-et-conferences/webinaires. The webinar is presented in French only.

Advance payments program – post-harvest component

Documents concerning the post-harvest component of the Advance Payments Program are available in French on the PGQ website at pgq.ca/producteurs/programme-de-paiements-anticipes.

If you have already received an advance under the seeding component, you must finalize your file by sending your post-harvest report to the PGQ, indicating the quantities you harvested. You can then request an additional advance depending on your inventory.

If you did not apply at the time of of seeding, you can now apply for a "post-harvest" loan of up to $1 million, with the first $250,000 interest free.

Nominations now open for the 2026 Réal Fredette Award!

The Producteurs de grains du Québec has unveiled the 2026 theme for the Réal Fredette Award: Une relève qui se distingue. The PGQ wishes to highlight young farmers who are innovating, seizing opportunities, and influencing the industry – farm businesses that stand out for having a strong next generation.

Nominations must come from fellow members in each of the PGQ-affiliated syndicates, which will be asked to submit a nomination for the award by Nov. 1. Nominated businesses must then duly complete and submit the nomination form no later than Jan. 16, 2026.

The Réal Fredette Award, named in honour of the organization's founding president, was awarded for the first time at the PGQ's annual general meeting in March 2025. In celebration of its 50th anniversary, the PGQ wanted to showcase excellence within the sector and within its membership.

Good luck to all the producers nominated for 2026.

PRODUCTEURS DE GRAINS DU QUÉBEC

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.

Canadian Foodgrains Bank

Why do we have famines in 2025?

Conflict continues to be the leading cause of hunger

Canadian Foodgrains Bank

In 2025, despite having the most robust famine warning systems in history, we find ourselves facing a grim reality: the official declaration of famine in both Gaza and Sudan.

These famines are human-made – driven by violent conflict, policy failures and deliberate obstruction of access to food. With these factors combined, we are seeing globally that approximately 780,000 people are facing famine-like conditions, while a further 162 million people are living with severe hunger.

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification system (a neutral body made up of food security experts) was set up more than 20 years ago to provide early warning systems to prevent future famines. These warning signs are meant to trigger the world into acting on behalf of the people who face starvation.

When a famine is declared it means that at least 20 per cent of households in an area have an extreme lack of food – so extreme that starving to death is a possibility, and that many people (especially children) could face critical levels of malnutrition.

In Gaza, Sudan and around the globe, conflict continues to be the leading cause of hunger. As an organization, the Canadian Foodgrains Bank believes that all people have a right to food that is nutritious and sufficient to fuel a person's daily activities.

The famines in Gaza and Sudan reveal many of the same challenges:

Early warnings triggered pre-famine alerts, even before the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification system characterized the situation there as reaching the official status of a famine. Yet, these systems are being bypassed, obstructed, or ignored.

Aid organizations are banned from operating, and/or are at risk of being attacked on the job.

Children are at the highest risk of disease and death once famine conditions set in, due to their vulnerability and inability to withstand prolonged starvation.

ANAS-MOHAMMED/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Famines in Gaza and Sudan reveal many of the same challenges: early warnings were ignored, aid organizations were targeted and children were among the many affected.

With conflict being the main cause of famine in Gaza and Sudan, Recently, Canadian Foodgrains Bank signed onto a statement from Women, Peace and Security Network calling for a cease to the hostilities in Sudan – a call that is just as critical for the individuals living in Gaza.

In both Sudan and Gaza, Foodgrains Bank demands an immediate end to the conflict, a significant scale-up of humanitarian aid, and unrestricted access for relief organizations to serve the individuals who are paying an extreme price for this violence.

Joint NGO Statement on the Humanitarian Crisis in Besieged Areas in Western Sudan

We, the undersigned humanitarian and civil society organizations, express grave concern over the escalating siege and humanitarian collapse in western Sudan. The deliberate obstruction of aid, targeting of civilians, and systematic dismantling of local response networks constitute clear violations of international humanitarian law and demand urgent international action.

Since early 2025, the Rapid Support Forces have intensified their military campaign across Darfur and Kordofan, laying siege to key urban centres and forcibly displacing tens of thousands. In response, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and allied actors have imposed severe restrictions on humanitarian access, expelled aid organizations from critical areas, and escalated repression against civil society groups and local responders. Humanitarian access in South Kordofan was severely restricted after Sudan's Humanitarian Aid Commission suspended 30 national and three international NGOs last April. These actions have created a humanitarian catastrophe of unprecedented scale.

In El Fasher (North Darfur state), over 300,000 civilians are trapped without access to food, water, or medical care. Markets have collapsed, and community kitchens have ceased operations due to lack of supplies. Children are dying of hunger.

In Kadugli and Dilling (South Kordofan state), active hostilities have rendered road access impossible, leaving entire communities isolated and starving.

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reports key roads between have been disrupted.

The parties to the conflict have continued to breach international humanitarian law, with ongoing drone usage and shelling of civilian areas.

The use of starvation as a weapon of war, the targeting of humanitarian convoys, and the expulsion of aid workers are not only morally reprehensible — they are prosecutable crimes under international law.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has documented repeated attacks on civilians in El Fasher and Abu Shouk camp, including summary executions and ethnically motivated killings. Between January and August, RSF assaults killed at least 212 civilians in Abu Shouk alone. And in April 2025, the RSF attacked Zamzam refugee camp, killing thousands.

The people of western Sudan are not collateral damage. They are civilians entitled to protection, dignity, and life. The international community must not remain silent as famine is weaponized and civil society is crushed. We stand in solidarity with the communities under siege and reaffirm our commitment to humanitarian principles, justice and the protection of life.

Signed:

Amnesty International Canadian Section (English Speaking)
Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)
Civilian Peace Service Canada
Canadian Foodgrains Bank
Centro de Promocion y Defensa de los Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos
Inter Pares
International Service for Human Rights
Sudanese Women Rights Action
Syrian Female Journalists Network
The Regional Coalition for Women Human Rights Defenders in South West Asia and North Africa (WHRDMENA)
Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition (WHRDIC)

The Miner Report

NANDO MACHADO/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Study shows fetal growth isn't the only factor driving mineral demand. Introducing minerals earlier allows the cow to become better at retaining minerals over time – but only if their diets provide enough to begin with.

Should we rethink timing of mineral requirements during pregnancy in dairy cows?

Marcos I. Marcondes
William H. Miner
Agricultural Research Institute

A recent study published in the *Journal of Dairy Science* suggests that it might be time to rethink how we feed minerals to dry cows.

For years, nutrition guidelines have assumed that cows only need extra minerals late in pregnancy. But this new research shows cows start needing more minerals much earlier – sometimes as soon as 30 to 40 days after conception. That means many cows could be underfed important nutrients – like calcium, phosphorus and magnesium – and sulfur during much of their pregnancy.

The study followed more than 60 pregnant and non-pregnant cows to measure how minerals like calcium, potassium and phosphorus are stored in the body throughout gestation. The results showed the demand for minerals increases steadily – not just in the last two months.

For example, by mid-pregnancy, sulfur needs were already six times higher than they were earlier in gestation. This steady increase suggests that waiting until the final trimester to boost mineral levels might be too late to support healthy calf development and set cows up for success after-calving.

One of the key takeaways from the research is that fetal growth isn't the only factor driving mineral demand. The mammary gland, placenta and uterus also begin accumulating minerals well before the last trimester. The study introduced a new way to measure how efficiently these tissues use minerals as pregnancy progresses, showing that cows become better at retaining minerals over time – but only if their diets provide enough to begin with.

Compared with traditional systems like NRC (2001) and NASEM (2021), this new model predicts slightly higher mineral needs in mid- to late gestation – especially for calcium, magnesium and sulfur. Importantly, these levels still fall within safe feeding guidelines and don't pose a risk of overfeeding. The goal is not to increase mineral intake across the board, but rather to match supply more accurately with the cow's changing needs during pregnancy.

It's important to note that this model still requires validation in other herds and conditions. However, it offers new insights into how mineral needs evolve during pregnancy and raises important questions about whether our current feeding strategies are truly meeting those needs. These findings deserve close attention from both nutritionists and dairy producers aiming to optimize cow and calf health.

For farmers and nutritionists, the practical message is clear: Don't wait until the dry cow is two months from calving to start thinking about minerals. Earlier adjustments could improve fetal growth, reduce metabolic stress and support better health and production after calving. It also opens the door to more precise and cost-effective mineral supplementation throughout gestation.

Bottom line: If we want to support the full genetic and productive potential of modern dairy cows, it's time to bring our mineral nutrition models into the 21st century. Nutritionists and producers should begin to consider gestation stage-specific mineral needs – not just in the last trimester, but across the entire pregnancy.

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.

Cookin' with the Advocate

Truffled Potato Croquettes with Chevre

CYNTHIA GUNN, THE ADVOCATE

Potato croquettes with goat cheese is fancy comfort food that is simple to make.

Ingredients

2 pounds floury potatoes, peeled and cut into large chunks (e.g. Russet, Kennebec)
1 whole egg plus 3 egg yolks, whisked together
1-2 tbsp white truffle oil
2-3 tbsp unsalted butter
1 tsp salt
fresh ground pepper
4 ounces fresh goat cheese at room temperature, in 8 small disks about ¼-inch thick
flour for dusting
oil for frying

Preparation

Place the potatoes in a pot and add water just to cover.

Bring to a boil, lower to a simmer and cook until cooked through, about 15 minutes. Drain and let sit in a single layer to dry off a few minutes.

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F.

Mash the potatoes in a large bowl.

Stir in the beaten egg mixture. Mix well to combine.

Stir in the white truffle oil, butter, salt and pepper.

When the potato mixture is cool enough to handle, divide it into eight equal portions. Shape around each piece of goat cheese.

The croquettes can be stored in the fridge at this point for two days if desired.

Dust each croquette with flour to coat all sides.

In a large pan over medium-high heat, heat an eighth of an inch of oil until it ripples. Working in batches, cook the croquettes until golden brown, about 3 minutes each side.

Place on a baking sheet and bake about 5 minutes. Serve hot.

Slightly adapted from White Dog Cafe Cookbook, 1998, p. 190.

Potatoes can be fancy – when dressed up right

Cynthia Gunn
QFA's Food Writer

Not every dish can or should be an everyday dish. Fancy is fun once in awhile.

These potatoes could be classified as such. But really, they're just a gussied up version of when Mom used to squish the leftover mashed potatoes into discs, dusted them with flour and fried them on both sides. They had to be really crispy. If they did not get left in the pan long enough to develop a deep golden brown crispy layer, they were recognizable for what they really were: leftover mashed.

As an adult, leftovers are the best thing going. Ready-made meals! Or, at least sides. What could be better?

Well, actually what is better is all the baking, frying and preparation dishes have long ago been washed.

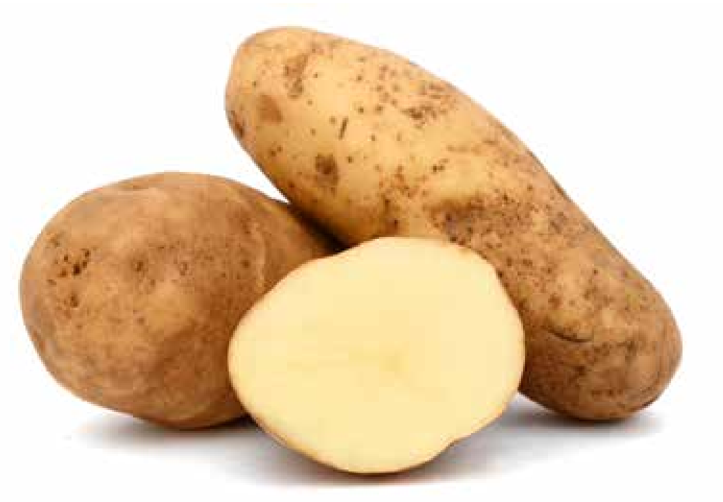
If you consistently feed a large crowd, agreed, leftovers can be pesky and are liable to get wasted. But if your daily cooking is for small groups and, particularly, if eating solo even some of the time, leftovers are a godsend.

In this recipe, don't let the call for truffle oil put you off in any way. Rather, I would encourage you to pick up a bottle when you can, and let it languish in your fridge along with the other rarely used bottles of this and that. Refrigerated so it doesn't go rancid, truffle oil (i.e., truffle-infused olive oil) keeps a long, long time. I don't really know how long mine has been in the fridge. It has been there a long time because one of the problems is it becomes hard in cool temperatures. So unless I think ahead – which is rarely – I can never drizzle it over pizza or mushrooms on toast.

So while these particular potato croquettes are definitely not leftovers, they are reminiscent of them. In a good way.

I'm going to try freezing some. What a treat to just pull these out on a whim and fry. Fancy comfort food made even simpler.

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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