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"Farming is driving around and around until something breaks, then driving around and around looking for the part to fix it, then fixing it, then driving around and around until something else breaks."

— Canadian author Margaret Atwood quoting her partner Graeme Gibson's description of farming after he had purchased several pieces of old farm equipment in an attempt to turn their farm in Alliston, southwest of Barrie, Ont., where they lived in the early 1970s, into a working farm

QFA VIDEOCONFERENCES

Wednesday, March 25
at 7:30 p.m.

From Derelict Farm to Experimental Progress

See page 14 for details.



MEUNIERD/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Farmers will receive an invitation to complete the census questionnaire in May, which they will be able to complete online.

StatsCan to launch Ag Census in May

Brenda O'Farrell
The Advocate

In 2021, there were 189,874 farms in Canada. That figure represented an almost 2-per-cent drop in the number of agricultural operations compared with 2016.

That same year, there were 153.69 million acres of farmland in the country. That was 3.2 per cent less than in 2016, and almost 8 per cent less than in 2006.

The average age of a farmer in Canada in 2021 was 56, a number that had been rising steadily since 1991, when the average age of a farm operator was 47.5.

All this information is known because every five years Statistics Canada

undertakes its Census of Agriculture, creating a detailed snapshot of the country's farming sector that provides information that ranges from crops to livestock, and from machinery to farm finance. And it will be doing it again this year, beginning in May.

That is when every farmer in the country will receive a formal invitation to complete the 2026 Census of Agriculture questionnaire via Canada Post. Farmers will be able to fill out the form online.

According to law, every registered farmer must fill out the Census of Agriculture questionnaire.

See CENSUS, Page 4.

Quebec's new sustainable ag proposal draws fire from producers

Farmers say cure may be worse than disease

Andrew McClelland
The Advocate

Quebec's Environment Ministry has tabled a proposed overhaul of the province's agricultural regulations – the first comprehensive rewrite in more than 20 years – and it's already stirring up a hornets' nest in the farming community.

The proposed regulation on agri-environmental practices, published Feb. 25 and open for public comment until April 10, would replace the *Règlement sur les exploitations agricoles* (Regulation on Agricultural Operations) that has governed Quebec farms since 2002. The government is billing it as a modernized, streamlined framework better suited to today's agricultural realities.

However, not everyone on Quebec farms is buying that pitch.

"This regulatory update is just too restrictive for our businesses," said Sylvain Pion, president of the Producteurs de grains du Québec, which represents nearly 10,000 grain producers across the province. "We believe in the continuous improvement of agricultural practices, but that has to be grounded in the expertise of producers and adequate support – not additional regulatory obligations."

The grain producers' group doesn't dispute the need for modernization. What it is pushing back on is the direction of travel.

See REGULATIONS, Page 4.



Just the facts

43,700

The number of acres used to cultivate apples in Canada. This is an area equivalent to 177 square kilometres, a space that would encompass almost 112,000 NHL-size hockey rinks.

Source: Canadian Food Inspection Agency

31%

The percentage of Canada's pork farm inventories in Quebec, making it the largest provincial producer in the sector in 2023. Ontario accounts for 26 per cent, followed by Manitoba, which has 24 per cent.

Source: Agriculture Canada

5th

Canada is the 5th largest exporter of agri-food and seafood worldwide.

Source: Agriculture Canada

35%

The percentage of the daily value of manganese found in a serving of maple syrup, the equivalent of two tablespoons. Manganese is an essential mineral that bolsters metabolism, bone formation and immune function.

Sources: Producteurs et productrices acéricoles du Québec Maple Syrup producers and The Nutrition Source

\$5 billion

The amount of exports generated annually by Canada's pork industry.

Source: Canadian Pork Council

ARE YOU LOOKING AT ME?



MADELELINE LANGLOIS THE ADVOCATE

These three were just hanging around the hay, taking in the sun on a recent bright day in Rigaud, near the Ontario border. As the temperatures rise and the weather warms, and just before everything turns too muddy, seems to be more than marvelous. In fact, you could say it's simply the most moooo-velous time of the year.



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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- voting privileges at the QFA Annual General Meeting

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



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Quebec offers farmers relief for carbon pricing

Up to \$30 per hectare being proposed to reduce premium charged on fuel

Frederic Serre
The Advocate

The Union des producteurs agricoles says the Quebec government's \$30-million plan to boost competitiveness for farm businesses by reducing the financial burden of carbon pricing does not go far enough to help the average farmer.

On March 6, the CAQ government announced the implementation of what it describes as an "important measure to strengthen the competitiveness of Quebec businesses specializing in field crops and thereby reduce fuel-related operating costs."

Caron says Quebec's farmers have already contributed more than \$550 million to the government's Electrification and Climate Change Fund since 2015, but have not seen any returns on their investment.

"Today's announcement, the third by the government, still falls far short of the agricultural sector's expectations," Caron said. "Carbon pricing continues to directly undermine the competitiveness of businesses, while there are still no viable alternatives to diesel and propane for many farm activities."

The \$30-million plan, which was announced last November as part of the Quebec government's economic and financial update, is aimed at some 7,100 businesses that produce cereals, grains, and oilseeds in a total area of more than 1 million hectares.

Producers do not have to fill out any forms to receive the financial assistance. The Financière agricole du Québec (FADQ) will disburse the funds, which could reach nearly \$30 per cultivated hectare, up to a maximum of \$50,000 per business. The first payment, in the

amount of \$20 million, or \$19.70 per hectare, will be made on March 30. The remaining \$10 million will be paid at the beginning of 2027.

"The world is changing, and the effects of these upheavals are being felt in all economic sectors," said Quebec Agriculture Minister Donald Martel. "In this context, this financial assistance is a concrete and direct action. The agricultural sector is competing with companies that do not have to bear the cost of their greenhouse gas emissions.

"Today's announcement demonstrates our government's commitment to giving some breathing room to those who get up in the morning to feed us," Martel added.

"While we wait for the agricultural sector to complete its energy transition, it was important to take immediate

and targeted action to support its competitiveness," said Environment Minister Benoit Charette, who made the announcement with Martel. "This assistance is in addition to existing programs and provides concrete support to the sector where it is most needed."

Stéphane Labrie, president and CEO of La Financière agricole du Québec, says he supports the government's initiative.

"The competitiveness of businesses is essential to the sector's sustainability," Labrie said. "La Financière agricole is proud to collaborate in the deployment of this assistance in a simple and effective manner. We remain fully committed to sustainable and forward-looking agriculture."

Local Journalism Initiative

Canada bolsters booming apple sector trade with Mexico

Frederic Serre
The Advocate

Following up on Canada's pledge last fall to bolster trade with Mexico, the federal government now says it is expanding and diversifying markets for the booming Canadian apple sector by supporting producers who trade with Mexico and other countries.

On Feb. 17, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) said it will now inspect and register all cold treatment facilities for apples across the country, which will eliminate the need for in-person inspections by Mexican officials, thus speeding up the export process.

The announcement comes four months after a trade visit to Mexico by Canada's Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, with both countries agreeing to improve cooperation as part of a plan to facilitate trade between the two countries.

The move was welcomed by stakeholders in Canada's apple industry. Apples are Canada's largest fruit crop in terms of production volume, generating the second highest farm gate value for fruit crops. In 2022, the value of fresh apple exports was \$51.3 million. In 2024, Canada produced 416,047 tonnes of apples.

The CFIA will maintain a list of the registered facilities in Quebec, Ontario, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. To export apples to Mexico, apples grown in these provinces must undergo cold treatment at one of the CFIA registered facilities.

**New protocol
will streamline
export process.**

"Growing demand for Canadian products at home and abroad is a testament to the quality of our agriculture industry," said federal Agriculture Minister Heath MacDonald. "Our government is committed to supporting the hard work, dedication and prosperity of our farmers and food producers as they pursue new markets in Canada and around the world."

According to Ron Lemaire, president of the Canadian Produce Marketing Association, easing trade barriers between Canada and Mexico is great news for the industry's market expansion.

"(We) are pleased with the recent update on export requirements for

Canadian apples to Mexico," Lemaire said. "This new protocol will streamline the export process, diversify Canadian apple exports, and meet the evolving preferences of Mexican consumers."

Canadian trade officials described last October's trade talks between Canada and Mexico as a "renewed momentum in bilateral relations" following Prime Minister Mark Carney's visit to Mexico and Mexico President Claudia Sheinbaum's visit to Alberta during the G7 Summit, which "presented new opportunities to deepen cooperation in sustainable agri-business, and inclusive trade, while benefiting economies in both nations."

For Keith Currie, president of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, the meetings presented renewed opportunities to boost Quebec's trade relationship with Mexico.

"Most of the corn that they bring into Mexico, for example, comes from the U.S., but given where the dollar is at and given where the trade tensions are, Mexico is certainly looking to Canada," said Currie, who added that Quebec's exports and imports with Mexico are looking very promising.

According to Mexicom Logistics, a Montreal-based freight forwarder that

gathers trading statistics, Quebec continues to be Mexico's second largest provincial partner in Canada, with top exports and imports that include meat and food products, aluminum, steel, aircraft and aerospace vehicles and auto parts, as well as IT equipment.

Last June, meat and food products exported to Mexico from *la belle province* reached \$14.7 million, and included hams, pork cuts and pork fats, while imported agricultural and food products represented more than \$6 million to include coffee, frozen orange juice and organic products.

Total Quebec exports in 2024 reached \$121.4 billion, which represents 17 per cent of Canada's exports, with \$91.1 billion going to the U.S. Meanwhile, Quebec imports the same year totalled \$106.9 billion, which represents 14 per cent of Canada's imports, with \$34.7 billion coming from the U.S.

"Quebec's robust trade relationship with Mexico – strengthened under the United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA) – generates opportunities across diverse sectors, including agri-food products," Mexicom said in a statement.

Local Journalism Initiative

News

Survey offers glimpse at Quebec woodlot owners

They are getting older, and forested land getting smaller

Frederic Serre
The Advocate

Quebec forest owners are getting older, more of them are now women and their properties are shrinking in size. Those are the key results of the latest survey released last month by the Fédération des producteurs forestiers du Québec (FPFQ), which represents about 163,000 forest owners in the province.

The survey, made public on Feb. 23, is the fifth issued by the FPFQ since 1974. It takes the pulse of the forest producing industry in the province.

According to the FPFQ, forest owners tend to remain largely unknown despite playing a key role in private forestry sector, and in rural communities.

The FPFQ conducted the survey with Groupe AGÉCO and Quebec's Ministry of Natural Resources and Forests. It

provides a glimpse of Quebec's forest owners, who collectively own 17 per cent of the province's productive forest. This survey tracks changes in their socio-demographic profile, motivations and behaviours regarding the management of their woodlots.

The results of the poll reveal a changing picture. The presence of women is increasing, and the size of their properties is decreasing. The survey confirms the observation already put forward in the previous study: the majority of owners own their forests primarily for the pleasure of protecting and managing a natural environment.

"Nevertheless, they remain active in the field," says FPFQ spokesperson Charles-Philippe Tremblay-Bégin. "More than three-quarters harvest wood, half carry out management work, and nearly one-third sell wood to the forestry industry."

"The results confirm what we are seeing in the field: forest owners are truly committed, but their circumstances have changed. This survey gives us the benchmarks we need to adjust the support offered through our unions and regional offices," said FPFQ president Gaétan Boudreault.

Beyond providing a statistical overview, the study aims to equip public decision-makers with the tools they need to adapt policies that support the sustainable development of private forests, said Boudreault.

"The survey makes it possible to take into account the current realities and concerns of owners in order to adapt the services, programs and support offered in private forests," Boudreault said.

Local Journalism Initiative

CENSUS: Profile of farming sector has been conducted since 1921

From Page 1

Statistics Canada has been conducting this survey every five years for more than a century. The first one was carried out in 1921.

Since that time, the data it produces has not only chronicled the economic growth of the sector, but has informed government decision-makers, industry stakeholders, international trade representatives and the tech sector on the needs, trends and importance of the farming sector.

"Farm organizations are also heavy users of census data and draw on this information to formulate policy recommendations, develop communications and outreach activities, and conduct market research," StatsCanada states.

Officials with the agency say the 2026 questionnaire will be shorter and easier to complete compared with the past, as farm operators will only be required to answer questions relevant to their operation's activities.

The data collected will include information to monitor environmental stewardship, the adoption of new technology and the impact of climate change on the agricultural sector.

Although most farmers will receive the survey in May, those living in remote areas of the country, including in communities in northern Quebec, were sent the survey in February.

Local Journalism Initiative

REGULATIONS: Criticism focuses on proposed restrictions

From Page 1

Pion was particularly pointed about what he sees as a mixed message from a government that has simultaneously promised to reduce the regulatory burden on businesses.

"This is all the more surprising given that the government also claims to be in favour of regulatory relief," said Pion, a grain producer from Bedford in the Eastern Townships. "And this while producers are already working with the support of agronomists who are members of a professional order."

The PGQ's concern goes deeper than any single provision. The group says the shift from a regulation focused on farm operations to one focused on agri-environmental practices signals a fundamental change in how Quebec sees the role of rules in agriculture.

"This direction gives the impression that our regulatory framework is no longer there to support us and encourage agricultural development, but from now on to restrict us and slow production through regulations," Pion said.

The Ministère de l'Environnement says the proposed rules are the product of an extensive co-creation process that brought together stakeholders starting in June 2023. Among the changes on the table: opening new parcels of land to cultivation across Quebec – reversing a restriction on expanding farmland put in place in 2004 in some municipalities

– and extending the regulation's scope to cover emerging sectors like insect farming, land-based aquaculture, and certain indoor growing operations.

The proposal also introduces soil conservation requirements for all agricultural operators, with particular attention to sensitive areas like steep slopes, and aims to improve management of animal waste and fertilizer use.

The PGQ did find a few things to like in the package, notably the provisions allowing for the return of certain areas to cultivation and the emphasis given to provincial rules over municipal ones – a move the group called essential for consistent, territory-wide application of

the rules.

But on balance, the grain producers' federation plans to dig in. The group says it will conduct a thorough analysis of the proposed regulation and is waiting for the government to publish its impact study before the consultation window closes.

"We intend to continue discussions with the government so that the implementation of this new framework fully takes into account the realities of the grain sector," Pion said.

Local Journalism Initiative

What Quebec's proposed sustainable farming regulations would do

Expanded land access

- A ban on expanding cultivated acreage – in place since 2004 in certain municipalities – would be lifted and replaced by the new framework, with conditions.

Broader scope

- Insect farming (entomoculture) would fall under provincial agricultural regulation for the first time.
- Land-based aquaculture operations would be brought into the regulatory fold.

Soil and water protection

- All farm operators would be required to adopt soil conservation practices, with heightened requirements in sensitive areas such as steep slopes.
- Improved management of animal waste and fertilization would be mandatory.
- The original regulation's goal of reducing phosphorus runoff into waterways would be retained.

Provincial primacy

- Provincial rules would take precedence over municipal regulations – a

measure the Producteurs de grains du Québec welcomed as key to consistent application across the territory.

Co-creation process

- The government says the draft regulation is the result of an extensive stakeholder co-creation process launched in June 2023.

The new rules aim to replace the 2002 Règlement sur les exploitations agricoles with a new framework on agri-environmental practices. A 45-day public consultation runs until April 10, 2026.

Cheese-makers leaning into 'squeak' of Quebec-made curds

Brenda O'Farrell
The Advocate

Do you know the difference between champagne and sparkling wine?

Or, how about the difference between Black Forest Ham and Virginia Ham?

If you are thinking about it, welcome to the world of distinctions without a difference – the culinary edition. It is a space where – if all goes according to plan – will soon include Quebec curd cheese, the key ingredient of what could one day be called “authentic poutine.”

Last month, the *Conseil des industriels laitiers du Québec* began the formal process to seek a protected geographical indication for this style of cheese. The designation acts as a type of trademark that links the product to a specific geographic region. In this case, that region would be the entire province of Quebec. If obtained, the designation would allow the product to be marketed as “curd cheese from Quebec,” or “*fromage en grains du Québec*.”

It would also require the milk used to make this cheese be from Quebec, the curds would have to be made in Quebec and the makers would have to follow a specific production protocol.

The *Conseil des appellations réservées et des termes valorisants* (CARTV), the agency that oversees the designations in the province, is currently considering the request for the designation, with a decision expected later this year.

According to the CARTV, the only provincial agency of its kind in Canada, the protected status provides what it terms “a public intellectual property right” that would be enforced by the province.

Currently, Quebec ice wine and Charlevoix lamb are among the short list of food and beverage products that have the designation.

The aim of CARTV is to protect Quebec's unique food heritage. Although no other province in Canada markets any of its food products this way, controlled designations have been used for generations in Europe, where they have successfully tied products to specific regions and manufacturing traditions. The practice has ratcheted up the marketability and promotion of the products, giving them a value-added boost that makes them both more recognizable and coveted.



JULIED/STOCK.ADOBE.COM

The distinctiveness of Quebec curd cheese is found in the 'squeak.'

In the case of curd cheese, the push to acquire the protected geographical indication comes as the famed Québécois dish known as poutine is gaining popularity in areas far beyond Quebec.

Whether the designation is obtained or not will not prohibit cheese manufacturers in other provinces from making curds, however. They will simply not be able to market them as authentic “made-in-Quebec” curds, which have a unique “squeak” to them. And be recognized in any future plans to market “authentic Quebec poutine.”

Maple syrup could be next

According to Sylvain Charlebois, the director of the Agri-Food Analytics Lab at Dalhousie University, the push for marketing distinctiveness has a dual function. As the U.S. continues to force more of its dairy products into the Canadian market, marketing Quebec-style curds not only fosters the processing tradition, but also serves to help protect the Quebec market.

The downside, however, according

to Charlebois, is that it also complicates interprovincial trade at a time when reducing these frictions is being prioritized.

But if the *Conseil des industriels laitiers* Local Journalism Initiative

What makes Quebec curds squeak?

Cheese curd manufacturing is not unique to Quebec.

In fact, curds are made in several other provinces, including Ontario where one of the oldest cheese makers, Fromagerie St-Albert, has been making them since 1894, long before poutine emerged as a popular dish in the 1950s.

But not all curds squeak.

That unique characteristic is not because Quebec milk is fundamentally any different from milk from other provinces, according to Sylvain Charlebois, the director of the Agri-Food Analytics Lab at Dalhousie University. It stems from the freshness of the cheese and how it is handled.

Charlebois says the “squeak” of the cheese is a sound that is created by the tight network of casein proteins formed during the earliest stage of cheddar-style cheese-making.

“When curds are extremely fresh, that elastic protein structure rubs against tooth enamel, producing the unmistakable squeaky sound,” he wrote in an explanation earlier this month.

But the squeak does not last. But it can be harnessed, Charlebois says. And that is what curd makers in Quebec have done. This is achieved by selling the curds quickly, without refrigerating them. This preserves the elasticity and moisture, he explained, thus maintaining the squeak.



LIMA CHARLES/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Funnelling farm waste to digesters produces a win-win, as usable methane and odourless manure are produced.



John McCart
QFA President

Last month, I participated in an event called PROSPERE Q, a one-day workshop organized by the Community Economic Development and Employability Corporation (CEDEC), an organization that aims to build economic benefits across a variety of sectors.

The event was hosted in Brossard and brought together more than 100 individuals, primarily from the English-speaking community, and from various fields, including the agricultural sector.

CEDEC president John Buck and his team organized the day that included two breakout sessions on agriculture that I and a small number of other farmers, educators and industry representatives took part in.

The focus of the morning breakout session was artificial intelligence in agriculture, and featured discussions on the future of a smarter farm.

AI is here

AI is finding its way into all sectors of the economy, and is very much part of how farms can be operated. All aspects

of running a farm seem to be bogged down in application forms, reporting on results and data collection. It's an area that AI can certainly help out in.

Meanwhile, some hope that AI can be used to better predict weather patterns. This is where AI can let the farmer do more of what he wants or needs to do. However, the analysis can be a lot more effective if the owner is better prepared.

Whatever the topic, it is clear there will be a sharp learning curve.

The discussion also looked at ways for a farmer to reduce the excessive machinery and labour costs. Sharing of non-time-essential equipment was explored.

Finding synergies

There are already some farmer groups set up for this that sees different farms sharing farm equipment.

Farm labour can also be handled this way, with different farms sharing a worker, such as a relief milker. This, however, can pose a challenge when using foreign temporary workers.

The afternoon workshop focused on the topic of waste – both waste generated by farms and food waste.

Everyone knows livestock farms produce manure and that there is a need to control the odour near residential areas. There is also a need to reduce greenhouse gases, which include methane produced by manure.

Methane digester

A representative of a company that promotes a methane digester sat at our table and he explained how locating an operation near a natural gas pipeline is ideal, but to operate a larger scale digester profitably, many farms are required to feed the digester.

With more than 20,000 digesters worldwide, this technology is not new, but finding ways for municipalities to cooperate in operating them is essential.

Around the Lachute region last fall, there was a lot of field crops including cabbage and cauliflower, that were not suitable for human consumption. If a digester had been in operation in the region, all of that wasted produce could have fed that digester.

The two main outputs produced from treating agricultural waste is methane and odourless manure. It is a win-win, but local communities need to get

on board.

There is also much more work that needs to be done to control food waste from restaurants and grocery stores.

The first step is controlling inventory. That is necessary.

The second step is working with food banks. This has increased in recent years as the demand for these organizations have also increased in our times of high grocery costs. Nothing should ever be thrown out, but if it needs to be, then it should be sent to a digester. This way more than just garbage will be produced.

Who will be at the forefront to manage this?

There are many specialized groups already up and running to deal with new technologies, but technology companies cannot be the only ones to benefit. Farmers need to make a profit, too. CEDEC, the Quebec Farmers' Association, and the ministries of agriculture will all have a part to play. In recent months, the turmoil has been constantly growing and farmers are more nervous than ever. Agriculture is vital, we must use every tool available to protect farmers.

Tech takes on bigger role in agriculture



CLOUDY DESIGN/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

In humid areas, solar panels could limit available sunlight below what is needed for optimal plant growth, while in drier areas, plants saw improved water efficiency under the panels that increased their uptake of nutrients like nitrogen.

Setting up solar panels on farmland has distinct pros and cons

Christopher Bonasia
The Advocate

Research about using solar panels on farmland continues to show that the arrangement comes with trade-offs, with possible benefits or losses influenced by factors like crop selection, fertilizer management and regional climate.

The findings are shown in two recent studies comparing crop performance in agrivoltaic systems, where solar panels and agricultural activity share space, and non-agrivoltaic systems. One study was conducted in the U.S., while the other focused on Europe. While neither study takes place in Canada, their findings suggest that agrivoltaic deployment here needs careful planning that considers the many factors that farmers already deal with.

In one study – Climate-driven divergence in biophysical and economic impacts of agrivoltaics, led by scientists at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign – the research shows how yields and profits are affected by agrivoltaics installations in different regions of the midwestern United States. The researchers used an economic model to estimate yearly net profits per acre from crop production

and energy generation over a projected 15-year period, and compared results across agrivoltaics systems, conventional farmland and stand-alone solar energy systems.

Region's humidity a factor

They found that crop yield performance, and the economic viability of an agrivoltaic system, is strongly linked to a region's humidity, or lack of humidity.

Humid areas in the eastern Midwest were likely to show crop losses after the panels reduced photosynthesis and lowered yields by 24 per cent for maize and 16 per cent for soybean, ultimately reducing profits by 16 per cent for maize and 2 per cent for soy.

Arid areas showed lower losses

But in more arid midwestern areas the solar panels reduced water stress, resulting in lower losses of 12 per cent for maize and a 6-per-cent yield increase for soybean. Overall returns were higher in these areas, with a 6-per-cent profit loss for maize offset by a 9-per-cent profit increase for soy.

In an email, Mengqi Jia, a research scientist at the University of Illinois and lead author of the study, said the research shows that agrivoltaics'

profitability cannot be attributed solely to climate-driven factors.

For farmers, profits are "closely linked to crop-specific, climate-driven patterns resulting from biophysical factors," while profitability for solar developers "depends on market conditions, including commodity crop prices, land-lease costs and weather patterns."

He added that the study's findings can be adapted to other regions with similar cropping systems, but "local factors, such as climate, soil characteristics and crop types would need to be considered."

The other study – Optimizing fertilizer use for sustainable crops with Agrivoltaics in Mediterranean climates – similarly looked at how agrivoltaics affect crops in different regions. But this study used a different approach that did not assess economic impacts as extensively, while focusing on solar panels' impacts on plants through influences of water, light and nutrients.

More benefits in arid areas

Those findings similarly found that solar panels had greater benefits in drier areas and less so in humid regions, but with

added insights regarding how the solar panels' impacts on light and nutrients.

Because humid areas have more cloud cover and less excess solar radiation, the shade from solar panels has less effect in dry areas, but in humid areas could limit available sunlight below what is needed for optimal growth.

In addition, water availability is not a limiting factor for nutrient uptake in humid regions, while drier regions benefited from improved water efficiency under the panels that increased plant uptake of nutrients like nitrogen. This also helped reduce emissions from fertilizer use in drier areas.

Crop productivity can be enhanced

The Europe researchers write that, overall, their results show that agrivoltaic systems "can enhance crop productivity while reducing environmental costs," but successfully integrating solar panels "with fertilizer management requires a nuanced approach, as their effects are not always synergistic and trade-offs may arise."

Both studies also state that agrivoltaics have high up-front costs that can be a barrier for farmers.

Trends in agriculture



STOCKPHOTO-GRAF/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Plastic made from corn, known as polylactic acid, or PLA, is biodegradable and considered an eco-friendly alternative to petroleum-based plastic.



Chris Judd
The Advocate

There are those who do, and those who don't

From committees, to AI and enviro-friendly advancements – people can make a difference

Everybody enjoys going to a good old country fall fair.

But many people don't realize that many of the best county fairs are organized and "manned" by volunteers.

Those of us who have the privilege to live in the Ottawa Valley know this, and many of us volunteer our time to help make those fairs happen. We also know many organizations, like Kinsmen; Lions; Rotary; Knights of Columbus; hospital boards and foundations; church groups, people who provide transportation to and from medical appointments; and the many farm organizations for beef, dairy, hogs, eggs, chicken, fish, maple syrup; and dozens of other groups. I have had – and in some cases, still have – the privilege to sit on some of those committees. And I have noticed that the best committees are those who don't pay their members. Non-paid members are dedicated to make the committee work.

Recently, I was privileged to attend a two-day conference in Montreal. There were about 100 participants from all corners of Quebec. The participants were volunteers who were not paid except for mileage and accommodations. There were five different workshops to attend. I was very interested in artificial intelligence and how it is being used in agriculture. We discussed opportunities and dangers of AI.

There are no restrictions on how AI is used. The recent school shooting in British Columbia had a connection with AI, as it has sparked questions about what artificial intelligence companies should do when users post disturbing content. This issue was raised after it was revealed that an AI company had flagged and banned an account belonging to the shooter in Tumbler Ridge, but did not alert authorities.

AI also has been used recently by special interest groups and governments

in feeding false information to citizens about "collective marketing" of farm products.

It is often used to promote a make of car, a variety of seed, chemical sprays or even the safety or danger of "climate change." It is only as accurate as the basic information that is fed into the computer – and by whom.

The "agri-waste" workshop was also very interesting. Making electricity from manure gas can be both profitable and good for our environment. Maybe some farms can collect manure gas and pipe it to a central location to turn it into electricity? The process of making electricity from manure gas can be very expensive. At least one U.S. state has implemented a program that allows electricity users to volunteer to pay a premium for electricity if that premium is used to subsidize some of the cost of constructing those expensive "on-farm" projects that make electricity

from manure.

Some people are very concerned about our future environment, while others are not.

Used plastic is a very big pollutant on farms as well as in households. Some municipalities have started a process to save and "bale" the plastic used for covering corn piles and wrapping bales.

Many years ago, the plastic that our farm used to "bag" silage was made from corn. That plastic was safe to use for fuel or compost. The plastic film used to cover newly planted corn (sweet corn) to keep frost off is also made from corn. It will decompose without picking it up. Why cannot all plastic be made from corn?

Most plastic today is made from oil. A very controversial local radio announcer once said: "we should keep the rest of our oil for oiling the gears and use electricity or hydrogen to power our cars!"



Townships dairy farmer brings the classroom back to the barn

Andrew McClelland
The Advocate

For Jacob Armstrong, the pull of the farm has never weakened – not through high school, not through summers spent elsewhere, and certainly not through three years of college studies.

“I looked forward for summers to roll around so I could spend my time alongside the people I loved most, helping on the farm,” said the 19-year-old from the Eastern Townships’ town of Cleveland, which is located about 40 kilometres north of Sherbrooke. “Learning from my father was a great pride I carried. Even to this day, I am grateful to have him alongside me.”

Armstrong is in his third and final year of the Farm Management and Technology program at Macdonald Campus, on track to graduate this spring. And when he does, he won’t be heading to an office, he will be heading straight back to Farm Hannan Armstrong, the dairy operation his family has run for four generations.

Armstrong grew up in Cleveland alongside his siblings – sisters Stephanie and Julie, and brother Sam. Their father, Leslie Armstrong, ran the farm, while their mother, Susan Hannan, balanced shifts as a nurse at the Wales Home with everything the farm demanded of a farming family.

“My mother carried a hard work ethic. She works and continues to work as a nurse while doing as much as she could on the farm, and balanced her work and family life graciously,” Jacob said.

All four siblings grew up working on the farm, though only Jacob has chosen to carry the farming torch professionally. Still, he says the passion for agriculture is something they all share.

His earliest memories are quintessentially farm-kid: tagging along in any tractor he could fit in, following his father and longtime farm employee Hannah Taylor across the fields. By the age of 9, he had put his first milker on a cow.

“For us as farm kids, daycare didn’t exist,” he said. “We would tag along wherever we could just to be a part of the farm.”

Taking knowledge back home

When Armstrong enrolled at Mac in August 2023, it wasn’t to escape the farm – it was to come back to it better

equipped. The FMT program gave him tools he couldn’t get from the barn alone: accounting, budgeting, crop management and business planning.

“Having educational programs like this allows future farmers to explore the many different options in agriculture,” he said. “If you’re planning to take over a family farm, don’t look at time as a barrier – the three years of schooling go by in a flash, and you come out confident with all the tools you need to succeed.”

His time at Mac also took him off the family property and onto other operations. Through the program’s internship placements, Armstrong worked at two farms in eastern Ontario – Sonibrand Farms and Gut Family Farms – where he gained exposure to different management styles and technologies.

“They expanded my knowledge and taught me new things outside of my own farm,” Armstrong said. “I had the chance to work alongside great mentors who always had my future in mind.”

A legacy to carry

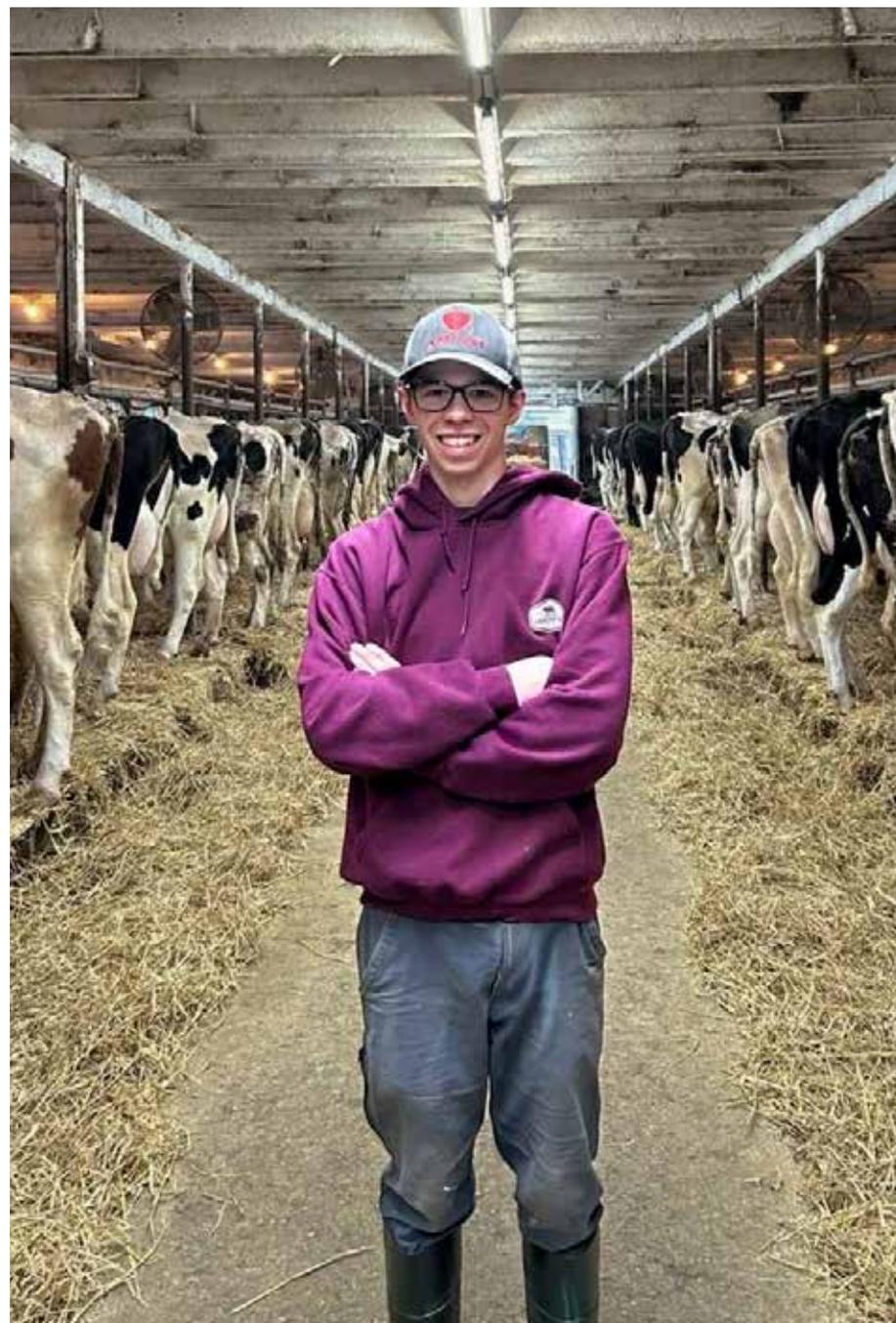
Armstrong isn’t approaching the farm transition casually. This summer, after graduation, he plans to take on 30 per cent of the shares in the operation. Over the following 10 to 15 years, as his father Leslie gradually steps back, the goal is full ownership.

He is also arriving with a capital investment in mind. Among his first priorities is installing a total mixed ration system, which he hopes to have operational by the end of the summer. Further down the road, he envisions growing the herd large enough to justify expanding into a free-stall barn with robotic milking.

Those ambitions are grounded in a clear-eyed view of what dairy farming demands today. Rising input costs – feed, fuel, fertilizer – are among the most pressing economic pressures facing producers, he said, and the prices farmers receive don’t always keep pace.

“Farmers must constantly adapt by improving their efficiency, whether it’s labour or feed efficiency” he said. “Farmers are constantly on the search for new technologies that will allow producers to maintain and develop their farm while protecting the environment for future generations.”

Like many young producers, Armstrong is aware that the public doesn’t always see the full picture behind the food on their plate.



COURTESY JACOB ANDERSON

Jacob Armstrong is set to graduate this spring from the Farm Management and Technology program at Macdonald Campus, before returning to his home farm in the Eastern Townships’ town of Cleveland, Que.

More than a job

“When products like milk are purchased at the store, the time, effort and dedication required to produce that product are often overlooked,” he said. “Dairy farmers work every day to ensure their product meets some of the highest quality standards in the world. Most farmers make a lifelong commitment at a young age to help feed their communities – which means being responsible for animal care 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with very limited vacations.”

For Armstrong, that commitment

isn’t a burden. It’s a calling, one he hopes to pass on to the next generation of his family just as his parents passed it on to him.

“I want my kids to grow up with that same passion in their hearts that me and my siblings share,” he said. “For the future, it may seem far to most, but for me, it is with great excitement that I am able to pursue such dreams and work towards carrying a legacy that has meant so much for many more generations to come.”

Local Journalism Initiative



COURTESY UPA

CFA president John McCart (FRONT, SECOND FROM RIGHT) and UPA president Martin Caron (FRONT, CENTRE) were among the UPA delegation who attended the Canadian Federation of Agriculture's annual general meeting in Ottawa in February.



Martin Caron
UPA President

UPA working at national level to help Quebec producers

Representatives of the Union des producteurs agricoles and its affiliated organizations took part in the Canadian Federation of Agriculture's annual general meeting last month in Ottawa.

The event was held under the theme Let's Grow Canada: Building the Future of Canadian Agriculture. It was an opportunity for discussion on a range of subjects, including the next strategic framework, the diversification of markets and new technologies. During the meeting, Stéphanie Levasseur, the UPA's first vice-president, was reappointed as CFA's second vice-president, while I will continue to sit on the CFA's board of directors.

Our involvement in the work of the CFA is crucial for Quebec's producers. The organization represents nearly 190,000 agricultural enterprises across

the country. Along with food and beverage processors, these agricultural businesses provided 514,400 jobs in 2024 and accounted for 3 per cent of Canada's GDP – five times more than the contribution from the auto industry.

Another subject discussed was, of course, the tariff dispute with our neighbours to the south. As shown by the recent ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court, this matter is far from settled. The situation serves as a stark reminder of the importance of maintaining the Canada–United States–Mexico Agreement, which greatly limits the impact of U.S. tariffs.

The general meeting also saw the adoption of a resolution by the UPA and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture calling for the immediate suspension of the high-speed train project. Ottawa must pause the project, carry out a rigorous assessment of the impacts, and allow for real consultation.

Many producers are also asking, with good reason, whether some of

the billions of dollars planned for this project could have been used for other purposes, namely agricultural ones. Remember that last fall the Canadian government announced cuts affecting many departments and agencies, including Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, which saw a staffing downsizing that will see 11 to 18 per cent of its personnel cut; the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, which was cut by 21.5 per cent; and Statistics Canada, which was trimmed by 11.7 per cent. In percentage terms, these cuts are much higher than the estimated average for the federal public service as a whole, which was reduced by 4.5 per cent.

The impacts are already being felt. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada has announced the closure of a number of research centres, including the one in Ste. Foy, and four satellite research farms. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency's Longueuil laboratory will also close its doors.

The cuts are not limited to staffing. Last fall's budget stated that the department would gradually phase out certain programs, like Agricultural Climate Solutions – Living Labs, which currently funds 14 projects across Canada, including two in Quebec. This is a particularly disappointing decision by the Canadian government. The UPA is working closely with AAFC to look for possible solutions.

Since last fall, the CFA has repeatedly raised concerns that these cuts undermine Canada's ability to innovate, ensure its food security, and remain competitive in the agricultural sector over the long term. We fully share these concerns. Delegates at the general meeting, therefore, adopted a resolution to increase AAFC's budget to 2 per cent of government spending (it is currently less than 1 per cent). Canada needs to adopt a real strategic action plan for agriculture, backed by resources that match our ambitions.

One MRC looks to bolster its farming sector

Brenda O'Farrell
The Advocate

The rezoning of agricultural land across Quebec for industrial expansion, special projects and urban sprawl is nothing new. It has slowly whittled away at the amount of cultivatable land in a number of regions in the province.

But nowhere is the pressure to change the vocation of farmland greater than in the area just west of the island of Montreal, in a triangular-shaped territory that stretches to the Ontario border, an area that makes up the MRC of Vaudreuil-Soulanges.

This area is firmly among the fastest growing regions in Quebec. Vaudreuil-Soulanges has witnessed a population increase that more than doubled the provincial average, according to the last two federal census counts, and housing construction in 2024 alone jumping 300 per cent. But much of the territory is farmland. That is why regional officials are aiming to update the area's agricultural zoning plan to ensure activities in the farming sector of the economy are maintained and supported.

About three-quarters of the territory within Vaudreuil-Soulanges is zoned for agricultural use, according to data from the MRC. That represents an area of just more than 160,000 acres. The region has also seen the number of farms increase in the last 15 year, bucking a national trend. But the type of farming in the region is shifting, with preliminary findings of the MRC's updated profile of the sector showing a significant increase in the number of

produce growers, while the number of animal operations has dropped.

But despite the health of the agricultural sector in the region, there is no denying the pressure it is under from development, says Caroline Cyr, a regional planning adviser and spokesperson for the MRC.

That is part of the reason why the MRC has decided to update its agricultural zoning plan, which was last profiled in 2014.

The exercise, launched last year, includes holding a series of three public forums aimed at soliciting input from the farming community, municipal officials and socio-economic groups in the region. The aim is to outline the priorities of the region's agricultural sector to ensure its needs and potential for growth are prioritized, as well as incorporated into the region's larger development plan, which is anticipating more residential, commercial and industrial growth, Cyr said in an interview.

The first two forums – hosted last November and in late January – have focused feedback on nine themes, including the promotion of local production, adapting to climate change, managing waterways, protecting agricultural land, taxation and co-existence with the non-farming community.

The MRC has also engaged a consulting group to update the socio-demographic and economic profile of the agricultural sector in the region. And it is within the scope of the preliminary outline of that characterization

that the growth of the sector and the shift within it is most easily seen.

According to the preliminary findings obtained from the MRC, there were 456 farm operations in the region in 2024, up from 438 registered in 2010. There was also a 17-per-cent increase in the number of farms involved in crop production, including fruits, legumes, vegetables and forages, between 2010 and 2024. These farms now account for almost 80 per cent of agricultural activity in the region.

During the same period, the number of farm operations that focused on animal production dropped by almost 30 per cent. These farms, which include dairy and beef cattle production, now account for about 20 per cent of farming in the area.

More farms are also offering direct-to-consumer sales of their goods, according to the MRC's preliminary data. Statistics show an 82-per-cent increase

in the number of farming operations that did direct-to-consumer sales in 2024 compared with 2010. And the number of operations that do on-site food processing for final sale have increased by 142 per cent.

Cyr described the farming sector as an "economic generator" in the region, with a growth in the number of smaller producers. The sector also accounts for 11 per cent of the region's employment.

Once the profile and consultations are completed, the MRC aims to create an action plan to help bolster its farm sector. Among the initiatives envisioned are establishing an agri-food centre in Rigaud, creating a hub to support small producers and encourage buy-local campaigns, and promote cultivation on land that has fallen out of production in the region.

Local Journalism Initiative

Credit for UPA Dues Program 2026

Revenue 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 (\$952) for 2026 and expect to have a gross farm revenue of **\$25,000 or less for 2026**;
- 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 2026, i.e., \$547.28 (\$476 plus tax);
- Must complete the application form and return it to the UPA by **October 31, 2026**;
- Must demonstrate to the satisfaction of the UPA that the gross farm revenue for 2026 was \$25,000 or less by sending us the required documents by **July 31, 2027**.

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

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

UPA L'Union des producteurs agricoles



COURTESY MRC VAUDREUIL-SOULANGES

The green shaded areas indicate the territory in the MRC Vaudreuil-Soulanges that are zoned for agricultural use.



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

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

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

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

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

Membership Application

Last name First name.....
 Address Phone.....
 Fax E-mail.....

PRICE

Agricultural or forestry producer, rural resident or retired farmer:
 1 year \$68.99 [\$60 + \$3 GST (5%) + \$5.99 TVQ (9.975%)]
 2 years \$137.97 [\$120 + \$6 GST (5%) + \$11.97 TVQ (9.975%)]
 My cheque is enclosed, payable to "Quebec Farmers' Association"
GST No. 107 867 814 RT 001 QST No. 100 611 322 9 TQ 001

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

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.

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

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

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

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

John Salisbury, Sutton

Carolyn Kidder, Wakefield

Winston Hodge, St. André d'Argenteuil

Earl Titley, Lachute

Margaret Blake, Compton

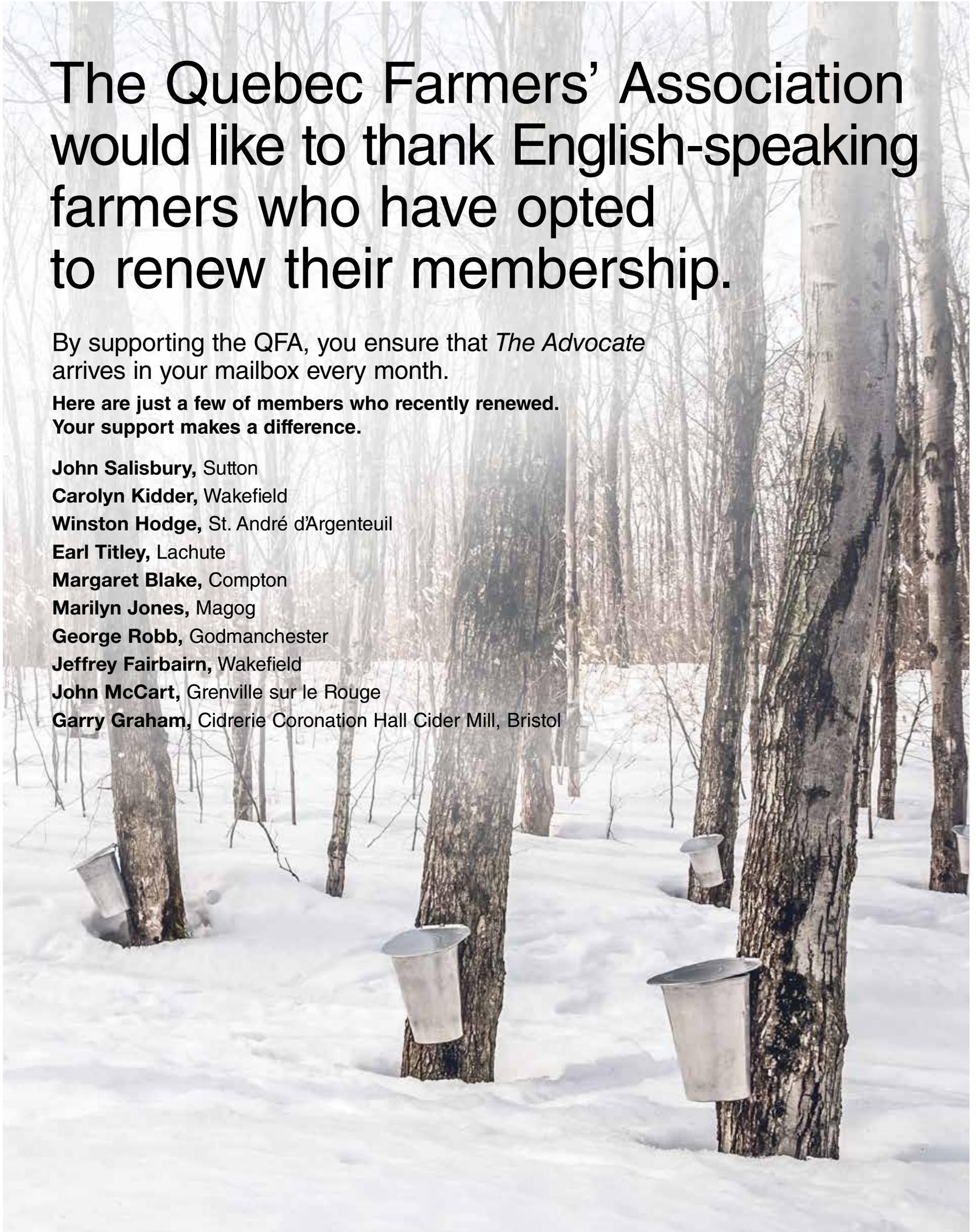
Marilyn Jones, Magog

George Robb, Godmanchester

Jeffrey Fairbairn, Wakefield

John McCart, Grenville sur le Rouge

Garry Graham, Cidrerie Coronation Hall Cider Mill, Bristol





QFA videoconferences

Save the date! From Derelict Farm to Experimental Progress:

Bringing a 19th Century Farm into the Modern Economy

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25, 7:30 P.M.

**With Marshall Buchanan
of Ottawa Valley Farm to Fork**

When Marshall Buchanan bought a 50-acre farm in Scotch Butch, Ont., he didn't realize it would one day grow from a hobby farm to a full-fledged business with Scottish Highland cattle, goats, produce, and a barn from the 1860s converted into a dining hall.

A registered professional forester with a Master of Science in forestry and environmental studies, Buchanan brought a lot of expertise to his Ottawa Valley farm business, which has allowed him to develop a unique outlook on land use, food production and heritage conservation.

Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81212225181?pwd=739b5QS8zBVswfQiP8ytbVxRKOVXIX.1>

Meeting ID: 812 1222 5181
Passcode: 944765

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

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



Farm transfers are not just about ownership

Consultant urges farm families to use data in succession planning

Andrew McClelland
The Advocate

"There was no transition plan, no road-map, no prep. It was just responsibility, and sudden responsibility at that," said Kelly-Anne Lahey as she recounted the moment her father was diagnosed with throat cancer and given four weeks to live.

Overnight, the management consultant found herself sitting at his bedside at Kingston's Princess Margaret Hospital, pitching ideas to clients she had never met and working through succession planning on the back of a hospital notepad. She had never run a business.

That personal jolt is what drives Lahey's work today. She leads Predictive Success, a consulting firm based in Whitby, Ont. Lahey told her story and shared her hard-won expertise during a videoconference Feb. 18 hosted by the Quebec Farmers' Association entitled "Transition: Rethinking the Legacy of the Family Farm."

For Lahey, farm succession is too often treated as a question of ownership and not enough as a question of readiness.

"Transition cannot just be about ownership. It's about clarity," she said. "In my case, it was about protecting what my dad had built for the past 20, 30, 40 years. And this is why I care so deeply about getting this right for family businesses in Canada."

1 in 12 farms not prepared

The numbers, Lahey noted, underscore the urgency. Fifty billion dollars in farm assets are set to change hands in the next decade, and only one in 12 farms is prepared. The reasons are familiar to

most producers: the financial and legal aspects of succession planning tend to dominate the conversation, while the harder human questions – Who is coming up next? Are they ready? Do they even want to do it? – get pushed aside.

To illustrate what good succession planning can look like in practice, Lahey walked through a case study she called "Bay Ridge Farms," a third-generation turkey operation run by a producer she called "Alex."

A successful owner-operator, Alex had never taken a vacation day, was the only person with a full picture of his books and operations, and was approaching 65 with four children who were, as Lahey put it, "half in, half out."

"He said to me, 'Kelly-Anne, I'm in trouble. I'm unhappy. I'm burning out. I'm nearing 65. I need to pass this down,'" Lahey recalled.

Typical case discussed

To help Alex find a path forward, Lahey's firm started with using a quick survey they call the "Predictive Index," a behavioural assessment that measures four core drives: dominance, extraversion, patience and formality. Lahey made clear that the Predictive Index is not a silver bullet, and that other well-validated tools exist, but she uses it because it's fast – the three-question survey takes five minutes to complete – and available in more than 70 languages.

The goal, she explained, is to move away from gut feelings and toward something more objective.

"We run numbers on every other area of our business. Why are we not running data on our people, our talent, our leaders?" Lahey asked.

For Alex, the results revealed a man

who preferred to work independently, disliked confrontation, and needed time to process decisions quietly – a profile that explained both his success as a sole operator and his difficulty delegating to his children.

What do kids bring to the table?

The assessment of his four kids pointed in a different direction than tradition might have suggested.

Olivia, the firstborn and long-assumed successor, was detail-oriented and organized. But with the farm in a growth phase – expanding sites, diversifying product, building new processing relationships – what Alex actually needed was someone wired to persuade, manage multiple priorities, and drive relationships forward. That turned out to be Sophie, the youngest, who had largely been overlooked.

"We are not designing for today," Lahey said. "We're designing with the future in mind. And that's where so many of us get it wrong in transition. We're thinking about who has it right today. We need to be thinking about potential."

QFA president John McCart asked Lahey about the question of timing, noting that a 65-year-old owner-operator is likely two decades behind where he should be in preparing successors. Lahey agreed, and said the instinct to simply keep working is not unique to farming.

It's tough to transition out

"I think it's anyone – farmers are naturally more entrepreneurial. They're more focused on their craft, and you don't want to leave your craft because it's a part of your identity. It's a part of who you are," she said. "And it's a



PHOTO COURTESY KELLY-ANNE LAHEY

Kelly-Anne Lahey is a consultant based in Whitby, Ont. She offered an online forum that focused on how to organize the process of transferring a farm from one generation to the next. "Transition cannot just be about ownership. It has to be about talent and readiness," she said.

tough transition out."

Lahey closed with a challenge she put to all producers in the room. The "one-day syndrome," as she called it – the quiet assumption that transition planning can wait – is one of the most persistent problems she sees across all 10 of the Canadian farm clients she has worked with recently. Not one had a documented strategic plan.

"Those who succeed have the courage to start early, the discipline to plan, the humility to prepare others, and the clarity to actually lead the change," she said. "If your 'one day' comes tomorrow, what are you doing today to prepare for that?"



Did you miss the last QFA Forum?

Recordings of past forums are now posted on the QFA website quebecfarmers.org

Watch them at your leisure.

Check out:

Transition: Rethinking the Legacy of the Family Farm

with **Kelly-Anne Lahey**, who tackles the topic of farm successions.

News

Farmers mobilize to protest high-speed train project

Brenda O'Farrell
The Advocate

Rural communities that have found themselves in the possible path of the proposed Alto high-speed rail line between Quebec City and Toronto are mobilizing to express their opposition, including farmers who have taken to the streets – along with tractors and placards – to send a message that their operations will be harmed if the track carves its way across their land.

“This is not vacant land,” said Élisabeth Arbaud, the owner of a CàB Café in Chute à Blondeau earlier this month at a rally in the small eastern Ontario town just on the other side of the Quebec border, where farmers from both Ontario and Quebec held a demonstration to highlight the cost they will be forced to pay if the rail line cuts across their farms.

Arbaud, who welcomes local farmers who often meet up at her restaurant, helped organize the event that attracted about 100 people. Local mayors from municipalities on both sides of the Quebec-Ontario border addressed the crowd.

“I am a farmer myself,” Stephen Matthews, mayor of St. André

d'Argenteuil, told those gathered in Chute à Blondeau on March 5. “The planned Alto project creates issues not only for the farmers, but also for those who visit their neighbours, have a cup of coffee, and now all of a sudden you will have this big wall from the high-speed rail potentially separating them.

“It will create a lot of dead-end streets, impact school transportation, and also impact our fire department's ability to respond quickly to different issues in the area, so we must do what we're doing now – gathering together in numbers to voice our concerns, make a statement,” Matthews said.

The demonstration follows a similar event held in late February in Mirabel, when about 200 farmers from across the Outaouais-Laurentides area took to the streets with tractors to draw attention to their opposition to the project.

The Canadian Federation of Agriculture last month at its annual general meeting approved a resolution put forward by the Union des producteurs agricoles and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture calling on the federal government to immediately suspend the high-speed rail project, and provide for public consultations.

The federal government's plan to



PHOTOS BY JOHN MCCART, THE ADVOCATE

Farmers from both Quebec and Ontario took to the streets in Chute à Blondeau in eastern Ontario, right across from the Quebec border, on March 5 to show their opposition to the federal government's plan to build a high-speed rail line through farmland.

build a 1,000-kilometre rail line along the north shore of the St. Lawrence River from Quebec City to Toronto will cross through Trois Rivières, Laval, and the west end of the province, cutting through eastern Ontario farm country to Ottawa, Peterborough and Toronto.

The exact route of the train line is still in the preliminary planning stages, and has not been defined in detail, with officials with Alto saying they will negotiate with land owners, but could resort to expropriations if needed.

For farmers across the regions targeted, the concerns focus on how farms could be affected. This includes the rail line severing farms into separate sections, limiting access to fields, and losing land through expropriation.

According to Alto, the development phase will continue until 2029-2030. It will then be presented to the federal government for approval. Construction will then roll out in phases, each lasting between eight and 10 years.

Local Journalism Initiative

Opposition to Alto rail project mounts in Ontario

The following is an open letter from ecologists regarding proposed Alto high-speed rail project:

As a group of ecologists and conservation scientists based at Carleton University in eastern Ontario, we felt it important to provide an environmental perspective on the proposed Alto high-speed rail project.

The proposed Alto project presents both environmental benefits and harms.

Benefits include potential decreases in greenhouse gas emissions, while harms include wildlife habitat loss, reduced ecological and hydrological connectivity, pollution and disruption of social-ecological systems.

Whether the harms outweigh the benefits will depend on how well the harms are mitigated.

Effective mitigation of the environmental impacts may be possible, but it needs to start now, before route selection.

For example, could the Alto line use existing rail and road rights-of-way to reduce habitat loss? And what about

the possibility of raising the rail line in some areas so that people, water and wildlife can transit freely below?

We urge the Alto planners to broaden their perspective at this most critical planning stage, to ensure that all avenues for protecting wildlife and ecosystems are included, so that the final result will benefit both people and nature.

Potential environmental benefits

There has been much discussion related to the environmental impacts of the proposed Alto project, but it has potential environmental benefits. Trains, especially ones powered by electricity, are an efficient means of transporting people while reducing greenhouse gas emissions relative to other sources of travel (e.g., aircraft, cars and trucks powered by combustion engines).

Alto would connect several major cities (Quebec City, Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto), so there would be an opportunity to reduce short-haul flights, which are among the most carbon-producing modes of travel.

A reliable, affordable rail line could also reduce road traffic, which would

reduce wildlife roadkill, a major risk to many wildlife species.

Potential environmental harms

The most obvious environmental harm from the proposed Alto project is the loss of natural habitat.

For example, the proposed routes between Ottawa and Peterborough would extend at least 270 kilometres and require a right of way that could be as wide as 100 metres. This represents a net loss of 27 square kilometres – almost 300 football fields in area – of the habitats that wildlife depend on, including forests, wetlands and river/lake beds.

In addition, unless carefully mitigated, the Alto project would sever ecological and hydrological connectivity in the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve, which serves to connect the Algonquin to Adirondack corridor. The Algonquin to Adirondack corridor is the most important natural corridor east of the Rockies and it has been designated by Parks Canada as a priority for conservation.

Pollution is also an important concern, particularly during construction,

as careful planning is needed to keep sediment from entering lakes and rivers where it can smother fish and other aquatic life.

The project could also disrupt the established social-ecological systems that exist in these areas, altering the ways in which people interact with the environment.

Ensuring a net environmental benefit will require mitigating the potential harms before a route is selected.

Dr. Steven J. Cooke, professor of Environmental Science and Biology, Dr. Joseph R Bennett, professor of Environmental Science and Biology, Dr. Grégory Bulté, professor of Biology, Dr. Dalal Hanna, assistant professor of Biology,

Dr. Lenore Fahrig, professor of Biology, Dr. Federico Riva, assistant professor of Biology,

Dr. Christina M. Davy, associate professor of Biology,

Dr. Rachel Buxton, assistant professor of Environmental Science and Biology, Dr. Jesse Vermaire, associate professor of Environmental Science and Geography, Carleton University



Paul J. Hetzler
ISA Certified Arborist

I don't know if nursery rhymes are different now, but many of the ones I grew up with were creepy. It was hard to sleep after a bedtime story about four and 20 blackbirds baked in a pie, who then sprang to life and pecked a woman's nose off. Or, the old woman who lived in a shoe and beat her kids before putting them to bed.

What really got me was the one where a baby is left in a cradle "on the tree top" and falls when a tree limb breaks. I kept waiting for the verse where Child Protective Services take the parents away for negligence.

I've since learned a few things about the cradle-in-a-tree scenario. One is that the story has deep roots in Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) and other First Nations' cultures.

My old friend Joe Bruchac, an Abenaki storyteller and author, once told me that a traditional Abenaki-language lullaby that has a baby rocking in a tree (but no tragic ending) could be the basis for the nursery rhyme. It was common in many Native American cultures, especially the Haudenosaunee, for a mother to strap her infant into a cradle board, the original baby backpack, which was then secured to a trunk or low branch while they tended crops or did other work. This gave the child an adult-eye perspective on the world, and kept the child within view.

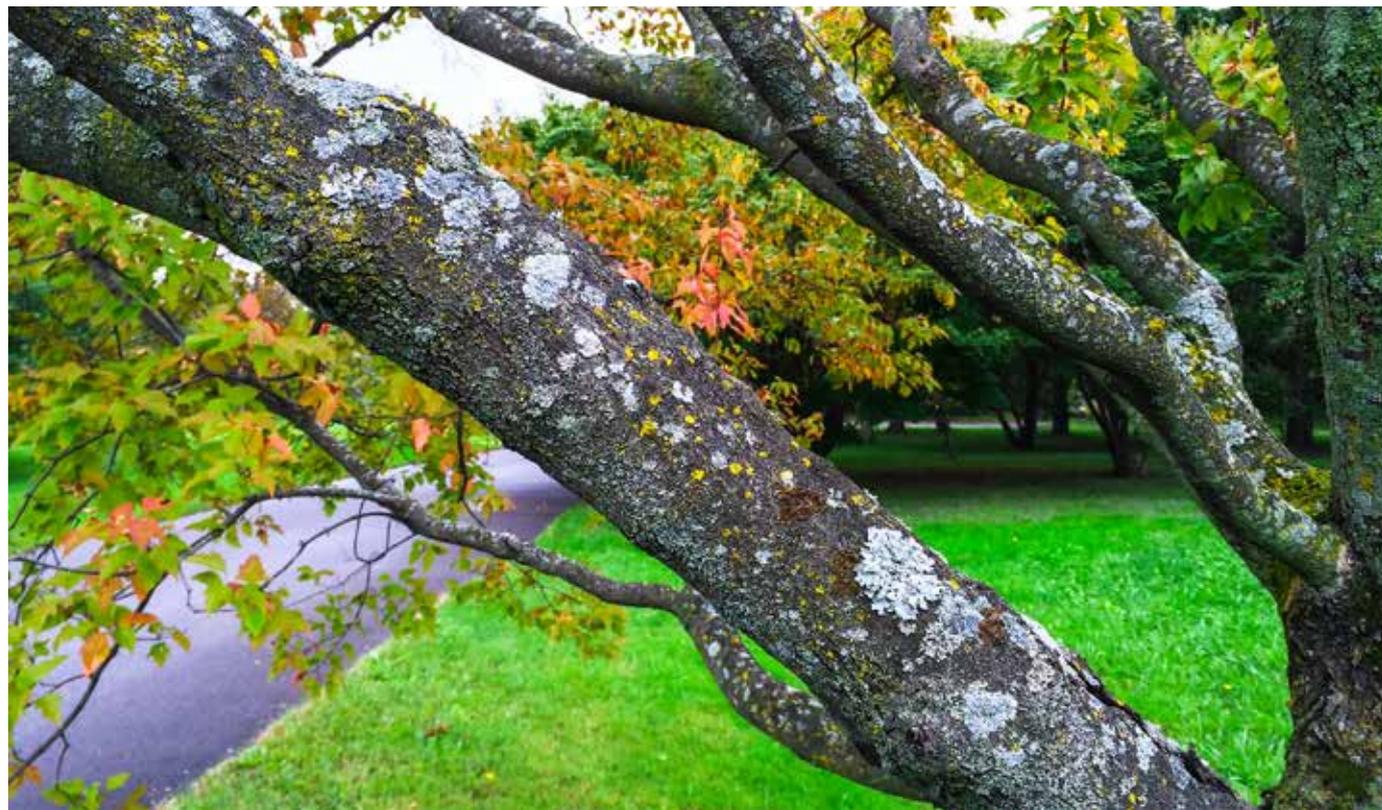
Limb breakage avoidable

The other thing I learned is that limb breakage is often preventable, and we can take steps to minimize future storm damage to our trees.

As an ISA-certified arborist since 1996, I admit that no one can predict breakage with certainty. However, a trained eye can spot many potential failures. It's easier to evaluate the structure of deciduous trees from late fall through early spring while the leaves are off, but a good arborist can gauge the hazard potential of the trees at any time of year.

A key predictor of limb breakage is the angle at which branches meet the trunk. The more upright a branch is in relation to the tree, the more likely it will split off during high winds. This may seem counterintuitive, but it's because there's nothing but bark

When the bough breaks: How to storm-proof your trees



STUDIO LIGHT AND SHADE/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

A branch that stems from a tree at a 90-degree angle is far less prone to breakage.

between the branch and trunk on the "uphill" side of the juncture.

Angles matter

By contrast, branches that meet the trunk closer to 90 degrees (horizontal) have sound wood on all sides of the attachment points, and are far less prone to breakage.

Selective pruning, particularly when trees are young, can favour strong branches and cull out many weak ones. Proper pruning will also remove dead, damaged, diseased or crossing branches, all of which are more apt to break in strong wind.

But limbs are not the only places a tree can break. If a tree has more than one main trunk, called codominant trunks, they can fail at the trunk-to-trunk union. This is catastrophic for the tree, rendering it hazardous. Needless to say, such failures often result in property damage.

Two not better than one

Codominant trunks are often weakly attached to one another, as they typically meet at tight angles with only bark (called bark inclusion), and no wood, between them. The good news is that most weak unions can be strengthened with the right kind of supports.

The further good news is that weak

codominant trunks are easy to find once you know what to look for.

One of the clearest signs is a pair of ears on a fork. I should explain. Trees are "self-optimizing;" that is, they respond to weakness by adding tissue to shore-up the situation. The weaker a union, the more a tree adds wood, in this case outward from the trunk in an "ear" or "clam shell" shape.

The next sign is a seam, or crack, running down the trunk from the union. A crack on both sides of the trunk implies a far weaker union than a single seam. Decay is an important clue as well, but it is not always evident. Obviously, conks (shelf fungi) and woodpecker activity indicate serious rot inside.

Finding one of these clues is enough to warrant professional advice, but if you see more than one sign, make it soon. So long as a tree is in generally good condition, even the weakest union can usually be stabilized with a cable brace installed two-thirds to three-quarters of the way from the union to the tree top.

When I became an arborist, all cable braces were galvanized steel, but since then the use of synthetic cables has grown. Although there are cases where steel cables are best, the synthetic cable systems let a tree move more naturally in the wind, often employing rubber shock-absorbers along their length.

Trunk movement is desirable because it stimulates the tree to make stronger wood. Special brace rods are sometimes used at the union itself in conjunction with a cable brace.

Every component in a cable system is load-rated and sized differently for each situation. With all due respect to the capable do-it-yourself folks out there, the wrong cable system is worse than no cable at all. Cabling should only be done by someone familiar with something called the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) A300 standard for cable bracing. This is an important point, as not all tree care professionals provide cabling as a service or know about the ANSI standards. Because a mature shade tree is irreplaceable in one lifetime, and because it's kind of inconvenient to have a large portion of one "drop in" on you suddenly, I think cabling, when needed, is worth the investment.

The take-home message is that in a lot of cases, breakage-prone limbs and trunks can be identified ahead of time, and pruned or cabled to help prevent failure. And that infants should probably not be left unattended in trees, or exposed to creepy nursery rhymes.

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



What dry period length says about your herd

Bruna Mion

Dairy Production Expert
and

Liliana Fadul

Data Science Manager
Lactanet

Two months off. No stress. Just rest and relax.

Sounds like nice vacation plans. It is just what we expect from cows during the dry period. This period is the best opportunity to prepare cows for the next lactation. When the dry period is managed well, cows are more likely to peak higher and perform better in the next lactation.

Ideal dry period duration?

There is no single number that fits every farm. Dry period length is influenced by stall availability, milk production, reproductive performance, labour, quota and incentive days. Because of these differences, producers use a wide range of strategies.

In general, very short or very long dry periods have been associated with negative effects in the production of the next lactation.

When the dry period is shorter than 25 to 30 days, the udder does not have enough time to fully recover, reducing milk yield after calving. In many cases, shorter dry periods are linked to shorter gestation caused by twins, abortions, dystocia or other stressors. Recent studies suggest that the factors causing shorter gestations are the main contributors to poor performance associated with the shorter dry period.

On the other hand, long dry periods often lead to excessive gain in body condition before calving. Over-conditioned cows are at greater risk of metabolic challenges and diseases. Cows that take longer to become pregnant and/or

have a low production late in lactation are often dried-off early, contributing to a longer dry period.

These associations are based on specific cows that fall outside the target range. However, a small number of cows is unlikely to strongly affect overall herd performance. To better reflect what happens on farms, we focused on herd-level average dry period length.

What are Canadian herds doing?

We analyzed data from 5,316 Lactanet herds across Canada. In 2025, the average dry period was 65 days. However, the distribution was wide. Most herds (76 per cent) were between 40 and 70 days. Less than 1 per cent of the herds were below 40 days, and 23 per cent were above 70 days.

This wide range made us curious to see whether dry-period length is associated with herd performance and the success of the transition period.

We classified herds into three groups:

- the 10 per cent of herds with the shortest dry period (48 days),
- the middle 80 per cent, referred to as the average dry period group (63 days),
- and the 10 per cent of herds with the longest dry period (97 days).

Herd performance was compared across these groups.

It's important to note that while the data explored here is collected through milk recording, errors cannot be identified retrospectively, underscoring the importance of accurate data entry. In addition, herds using embryo collection, or IVF protocols, may have a longer dry period average because of their reproductive strategy, and this was not accounted for in the analysis.

Production tells a clear story

Herds with the longest dry periods had

the poorest performance (Figure 1). Compared with average dry period herds, they produced on average 1,437 kilograms less milk, 66 kilograms less fat, and 52 kilograms less protein per year.

Herds with short dry periods performed only slightly below the average group. Although fat and protein yields were similar, herds with a short dry period produced on average 217 kilograms less milk per year. These herds also had higher days in milk, which likely reflects a management choice to milk cows longer before dry-off rather than a high number of cows calving early.

The number of lactating cows was similar between short and average dry period herds (about 92 cows), while herds with long dry period were smaller, averaging 73 lactating cows.

What happens during the transition?

The transition period is the most challenging time for cows, and dry cow management strongly influences success after calving. We also examined the impact of dry period duration on key transition indicators (Table 1).

Herds with short or long dry periods had lower Transition Management Index (TMI) averages and a higher proportion of cows with negative TMI. These herds also had lower milk yield at peak.

Although the proportion of cows with elevated milk BHB, which indicates subclinical ketosis, was similar across groups, herds with the longest dry periods had the highest percentage of cows culled by 60 DIM. A longer dry period could be associated with high body condition at calving, leading to more metabolic challenges and increasing the risk of diseases, and

consequently the risk of culling early in lactation.

Does housing type change the picture?

We regrouped herds based on their dry period duration into free-stall herds and tie-stall herds.

The same general patterns were observed in both housing types. Both housing systems had similar averages in the short dry period group. In the long dry period group, tie-stall herds had even longer averages (104 days) and much greater variation between herds.

Despite these differences, the negative impact of long dry periods on performance and transition success was consistent across housing types.

What does this mean on farm?

The target dry period duration is different for every herd. Our results show that a moderately short dry period can support good production. The short dry period herds still had averaged more than 35 days dry, allowing cows enough time to recover and prepare for the next lactation. This helps explain why their performance was like herds with an average dry period.

The greatest risk is when the dry period is too long, which was associated with lower milk and component yields and increased early culling. Longer dry periods can result from poor reproduction, low production and space availability. Improving those metrics, avoiding excessive body condition gain and strengthening transition cow management can improve long-term herd performance.

Getting the dry period right is about consistency across the herd and setting cows up for a productive next lactation.

Figure 1. Average milk, fat and protein yields and days in milk of herds classified as short, average, or long dry period.

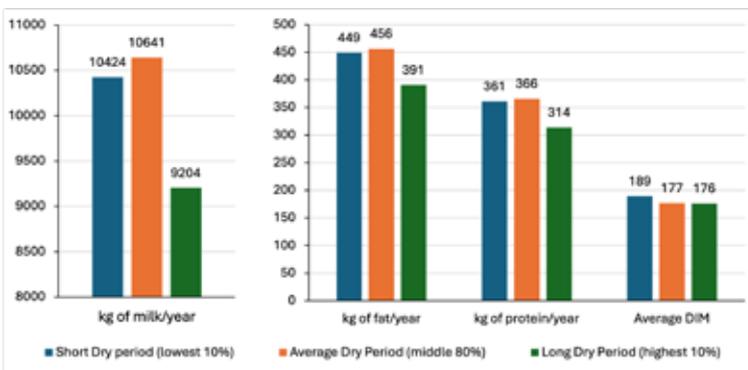


Table 1. Transition indicators of herds classified as short, average or long dry period.

	Short dry period (lowest 10%)	Average dry period (middle 80%)	Long dry period (highest 10%)
Average Transition Management Index (TMI)	-135	31	-28
Cows with a negative TMI	54 %	46 %	50 %
Cows with BHB in milk >0.20 mmol/L	22 %	23 %	20 %
Peak milk yield	40 kg	42 kg	39 kg
DIM at peak	53	52	51
Cows culled <60 DIM	6.1 %	6.7 %	7.5 %

War in Middle East pushing fertilizer prices upward

Ramzy Yelda

Senior Market Analyst

Producteurs de grains du Québec

The war in the Middle East should not impact the world's grain market, as countries involved are very large exporters of oil and gas, not grains. As for their combined grain demand, it is quite minor relative to world demand.

On the other hand, fertilizers are directly impacted. The Middle East

is one of the world's largest fertilizer producers, while the Strait of Hormuz, which closed earlier this month, is a crucial shipping route for exports. About 35 per cent of global urea exports pass through the waterway. The route also handles 45 per cent of global sulphur exports, a key ingredient used to produce phosphate fertilizers, as well as significant volumes of ammonia, a key ingredient for nitrogen fertilizers.

The Strait of Hormuz, which closed earlier this month, is a crucial shipping route for exports

The Persian Gulf sits at the structural centre of this system. It not only provides access to some of the world's

cheapest natural gas, essential for ammonia production, its vast capital investments have built ammonia and urea capacity in countries within the region, including Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Fertilizers are a major input for grain growers. Fertilizer prices have already jumped: whether they keep going up or not will be determined by the length of the war and its impact on navigation in the Persian Gulf.

2026 Réal Fredette Award: A new generation stands out

As part of the Producteurs de grains du Québec's 50th anniversary, the organization wanted to mark grain production excellence among its members. Thus, a brand-new award highlighting the special efforts of a selected grain producer was unveiled and presented for the first time in 2025.

This year, the Réal Fredette Award, named in honour of the PGQ's founding president, will reward an outstanding example from the next generation of young producers. This award is presented annually by the PGQ, and the theme varies from year to year.

In 2026, six nominations were submitted:

- Benjamin Boivin, submitted by the Producteurs de grains in the Estrie region
- Alexandre Champagne, submitted by the Producteurs de grains in the Lanaudière region
- Thomas Leblanc, submitted by the Producteurs de grains in the Mauricie region
- William Overbeek, submitted by the Producteurs de grains in the Montérégie Nord region
- Simon Durivage, submitted by the Producteurs de grains in the Montérégie Ouest region
- Miguel Goyer, submitted by the Producteurs de grains in the Outaouais-Laurentides region

The winner will be announced on March 26, at the PGQ's Annual General Meeting.

Annual General Meetings

The annual general meetings for the Quebec grain producers' joint plan (PCPGQ) and the Producteurs de grains du Québec (PGQ) will be held on March 26-27, at the Best Western Hotel in Drummondville. The theme will be "For a prosperous and sustainable agriculture sector: a real action plan!"

Talks and presentations on a variety of topics are scheduled, including a lecture by Guillaume Lavoie, who is a fellow at the Raoul-Dandurand Chair, as well as an international observer and a public policy entrepreneur. Once again this year, more than 250 grain producers are expected to attend this major provincial event.

Information: <https://pgq.ca/aga-des-pgq/aga-2026>

Carbon pricing: Reimbursing and exempting farmers is crucial

In a press release issued on February 23, the PGQ asked all Quebec political parties – and all candidates for elected office – to commit to eliminating carbon pricing for the agriculture sector and to reimburse the money they have paid through the system so far.

"Quebec grain producers have had enough. Carbon pricing has significant financial consequences for our businesses because we have to absorb costs that we can neither avoid nor reduce with the technologies currently available. Costs are imposed on us without giving us the appropriate tools to reduce them. This situation is unfair, it is inefficient, and it must stop," stated Sylvain Pion, president of the Producteurs de grains du Québec.

As the provincial election approaches, the PGQ believes it is time for all Quebec political parties – and their candidates – to clearly recognize this reality and undertake to correct the injustice of this tax that undermines the competitiveness and future of farm businesses.

Field crop businesses are suffering major financial consequences as a result of carbon pricing. In total, grain producers have contributed more than \$150 million to the Electrification and Climate Change Fund in recent years – nearly 30 per cent of contributions come from the agriculture sector – whereas less than 2 per cent of the fund's climate-related investments have been directed to the grain sector.

"We are among those who are the most exposed to climate impacts, but the least supported," Pion said. "We are providing massive funding for the ECCF without having access to the means necessary to reduce our emissions or improve our resilience. Despite announcements made in recent years, the funds are slow to materialize and remain largely insufficient compared with the amounts paid since 2015. This imbalance must be corrected."



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



CANADIAN FOODGRAINS BANK

From 2016 to 2024 – less than a decade – the number of acutely food insecure people nearly tripled, from 105 million people to 295 million people, according Global Report on Food Crises, produced by a worldwide network of agencies that assesses the state of food insecurity and malnutrition.

The world cannot ignore global hunger

Andy Harrington
Canadian Foodgrains Bank

Despite decades of progress, and there is more than enough food for the global population, more than 700 million people are living with the daily reality of hunger.

And while the needs have risen significantly, we cannot say the same for global aid.

Last year saw extreme hunger spread at a pace not seen in decades, as the world averted its gaze. Gaza crossed into famine, following Sudan, where famine started in 2024 and grew in 2025. These are stark reminders of the human cost of inaction, and how quickly hunger can escalate when the world chooses to look away.

What is even more shocking is that these were not isolated tragedies, but a reflection of staggering need happening in multiple regions around the world.

From Haiti to South Sudan and Yemen, millions of people are living

through the scary reality of a devastating hunger crisis.

And while people are watching their loved ones die because of hunger, governments around the world are cutting their international development assistance budgets to focus on domestic concerns and military spending. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs warns that global funding for humanitarian response fell by a third in 2025, leaving only 11 per cent of the required resources covered.

Against a tide of crises, our greatest moral failure is choosing to turn away. Given that official development assistance makes up a mere 2 per cent of Canada's federal budget, cutting it back now won't serve us well. Instead, it jeopardizes the very stability that benefits Canada and the world.

In less than a decade, according to the Global Report on Food Crises, we saw the number of acutely food insecure people nearly triple, from 105 million people in 2016 to 295 million people in

2024. And that's not including figures for 2025, or the devastating impacts we'll see in 2026 from funding cuts.

The humanitarian sector is truly overstretched. Yet, we continue with hope.

Even amid political turbulence, misinformation and a distrust that threatened to undermine humanitarian work, meaningful gains were made in 2025 in the humanitarian sector. Life-sustaining support reached tens of millions of children – with meals, safe drinking water and essential medical care. Early-warning systems, resilient farming techniques and targeted nutrition programs strengthened families in hunger-affected areas, helping them endure through crisis.

This is the tireless work of our 15 Canadian member agencies and their local partners working in 37 countries overseas. It reflects the dedication of every organization in the humanitarian sector striving to make this world a better place for all of us.

And it is worthy work – because

when people and governments step up to provide food for people facing hunger, lives are saved.

We also see hope in the generosity of Canadians. Even in a year when Canadian farmers in some regions faced incredible challenges with drought, they still chose to give.

"Despite the fact that our yields are down, and we're having struggles with our crops, we're not going to go hungry – unlike people in the developing world where if their crops fail, they're without food," said a Foodgrains Bank supporter who farms in Niagara, Ont.

Ending hunger is not a technical or financial challenge; it is a moral one. In fact, the UN estimates that achieving zero hunger would cost less than 1 per cent of global military spending. That is a choice we have the power to make. But will we?

Andy Harrington is the executive director of the Canadian Foodgrains Bank.

More than just a scratch: Grooming brushes for dairy cattle

Heather Dann

William H. Miner

Agricultural Research Institute

Watching a cow groom herself with an automated brush is often a highlight for non-farm visitors to the Miner Institute. The skill with which a cow manoeuvres the bristles around her body never ceases to amaze those in attendance. Providing access to a brush promotes natural grooming behaviour in cows, improves cow hygiene and helps visitors feel confident about the care our cows receive.

Grooming brushes are becoming more common on farms for several good reasons. Indoor housed cows are highly motivated to use a grooming brush because they don't have access to trees or other natural structures for scratching. Although grooming is a natural behaviour, it is considered nonessential.

Researchers at the University of British Columbia have suggested the amount of time that a cow spends using mechanical grooming may be a sensitive indicator of animal health and welfare.

Use of mechanical grooming brushes is influenced by several factors. Brush use increases when fewer cows share each brush. And cows are more likely to use a brush when it is located near feed or water, according to UBC research. The brushes at our farm are typically placed near waterers, often in wide crossover alleys.

They like it

Although grooming is nonessential, unlike feeding and drinking, a grooming brush is a valued resource that cows will fight over. On our farm, we have a mechanical rotating and swinging brush that occasionally blows a fuse. The longer cows are without access to the brush, the more aggressive the competition becomes once it is operational again.

Dominant cows tend to use a brush sooner, more frequently and for a longer duration than subordinate cows. Kentucky researchers suggested no more than 60 cows per brush to avoid brush overstocking and reduce issues with competition.

Over the years we have installed several different types of brushes in pens for both lactating and dry cows. These have ranged from two-way scratch stationary brushes to flex-swing brushes



PARILOV/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Dominant cows have been found to use a brush more frequently and for longer periods of time.

to mechanically rotating and swinging brushes. Although we have never formally tested brush preference on our farm, the enthusiasm cows show for the rotating and swinging brushes would certainly make me bet on that style being their favourite.

Not every brush hits the spot

Recent work from researchers at Purdue University sheds some light on brush preference. Their study evaluated cow preferences for three brushes that were similar in appearance and materials, but differed mechanically. They were either stationary, swinging or swinging and rotating.

Over nine days, each cow had access to all the brushes during five-minute test sessions. Overall, 71 per cent of the cows preferred the swinging-rotating brush, 21 per cent preferred the swinging-only brush, and 8 per cent preferred the stationary brush.

Interestingly, grooming time varied by brush type and body part (see table).

Cows used the stationary brush almost exclusively for the head and rarely engaged it for other body parts. This brush likely provided more tactile precision for head grooming. Cows use the swinging-rotating brush

more than the stationary brush, but not the swinging-only brush to groom the neck.

Preferences developed

For grooming the back and rump areas, cows favoured both the swinging-rotating and swinging-only brushes over the stationary brush.

Overall, cows showed a clear preference for brushes that could swing. The researchers noted that although all brushes were made from similar materials, the ability to rotate or swing was an important feature. These design elements allowed cows to groom a wider range of body parts more easily and likely contribute to the brush's

enrichment value. The interactive nature of the brush occurred when a cow pushed against it, activated movement, and provided both visual and physical stimulation.

Grooming brushes are more than just a scratch. They are a smart investment in cow welfare and a visible demonstration of our commitment to responsible animal care.

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.

	Brush type		
	Stationary	Swinging-only	Swinging-rotating
Brush Use By Area, seconds per 5-minute session			
Head	122	103	113
Neck	13	59	95
Back	1	31	92
Rump	9	81	144
Brush Use By Area, % of total time			
Head	36	31	33
Neck	8	35	57
Back	1	25	74
Rump	3	35	62



Pumpkin Muffins or Loaf



CYNTHIA GUNN, THE ADVOCATE

Pumpkin loaf and muffins are moist enough that they are still great the next day. And, of course, they freeze well, too.

INGREDIENTS

¾ cup butter
1 cup sugar
2 eggs
15 ounces pumpkin puree
2 cups all-purpose flour (substitute ½ cup whole wheat flour if on hand)
½ teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon ground cloves
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1 teaspoon nutmeg

PREPARATION

Preheat oven to 325° F. Prepare pans.

Soften butter and beat with most of the sugar, reserving a couple of tablespoons to sprinkle on top.

Then, beat in eggs one at a time. Beat in puree.

Sift dry ingredients together and beat gently, on low speed, into butter mixture. The batter will be thick.

Scoop into pans and sprinkle with reserved sugar.

This recipe makes one large loaf, or 12 large muffins, or 12 medium and 12 mini muffins. The loaf needs 65 minutes in the oven; the muffins, 18-35 minutes depending on size.

When it comes to muffins, pumpkin are most popular

Cynthia Gunn

QFA's Food Writer

The other day I offered to make muffins. Nine teens, one of them my own, were going on an Outdoors Club overnight visit to Gatineau Park. Next to the rest of the food that I could see gathering on our living room floor, which served as base camp, this seemed like an addition that might help counter, but not severely veer from, what was clearly an end-of-season all-out junk-food venture.

Aside from carrots, hummus, and cheese and crackers, the menu seemed to be made up entirely of large quantities of smores, rounded out with the requisite bags of chips and candy. Who was I to mess too deeply with the diet of this normally pretty darn healthy gaggle of outdoor enthusiasts.

My offer to make muffins was enthusiastically accepted, but sparked a question: "What kind?" I asked.

"Pumpkin," came the response.

Of course, I should have guessed. In this regard, the kids did not take after their Scottish father. To Scots, pumpkins are for animals. I get that, if we're talking about the large watery ones. But don't lump the small sugar pumpkins into the same derisive pile. Pumpkin pie at Thanksgiving, with loads of pillowy whip cream, was not enjoyed by all in our house.

Confession: I never get around to cutting up and roasting and pureeing that perfect little sugar pumpkin that graces the table decoration for a few weeks every fall. I go for the can. Because of this, I tell myself, the kids learned to make pumpkin muffins from the time they were 10. Probably their favourite, they are easy to make and are good keepers, too. Dense enough to ward off getting squashed in a lunch bag, moist enough that they are still great the next day. And, of course, they freeze perfectly. Besides, I can look at the nutritional content on the label, which I can't do on the side of a pumpkin, and feel good about all that Vitamin A they're getting, ignoring the fact that they eat so many carrots it's a moot point.

As the muffins were being pulled from the oven, a friend walked in the door and exclaimed how good it smelled in the house. One of the teens did a taste test shortly after and enthusiastically stated, "10 out of 10!" How could you not bake some?

A final note. Tins of pumpkin tend to come in the 32-ounce size. It seems just as easy to double the recipe rather than freeze a portion of pumpkin that then gets buried in the deep freeze until the next decade.

My Kitchen Aid does not have the capacity to double the recipe in one go, however. Rather, to be precise, I make the recipe twice. Just a warning so you don't end up with flour all over the place because you run out of space in your mixing bowl.

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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