Quebec Farmers'
Advocate

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'In a Parti Québécois government, the minister of Agriculture will be a key minister for protecting our food sovereignty and recognizing the contribution of producers to our economy.'

— Paul St-Pierre Plamondon in a statement issued by the PQ during the campaign before the Oct. 5 vote

QFA VIDEOCONFERENCES

Wednesday, October 21
at 7:30 p.m.

Beekeeping, Family and Highland Cattle

See page 13 for details.

Protest against Alto heats up



THE ADVOCATE

With the new Parti Québécois government promising to withdraw Quebec from the proposed Alto high-speed rail project and the latest cost estimates released earlier this month by the federal Parliamentary Budget Office showing the project will cost more than earlier stated, the fight to block the project launched by farmers is building steam. Read what farmers had to say at a protest staged last month at a dairy farm in Rigaud, Que., near the Ontario border that is located in the possible path of the rail line. And how the small Quebec town of Pointe Fortune could be impacted. **See stories on Pages 4 and 5 on Pages 8 and 9.**

Regenerative farming: An inspiring story of how one farm embraced change and is prospering

What was once a little farm in a little town that was settled by an Irish family fleeing the famine in the 1800s is today the headquarters of a sod-growing company that produces grass that ends up on golf courses, sports fields, even on the lawn of Parliament Hill.

But the current success is not about the crop it sells, but the soil it has built up that grows it.

Jared Hamilton is the farm's fifth-generation owner. He is also the operator of Mountainview Turfgrass, a company his father founded almost 50 years ago.

But when he and his sister bought out their parents in 2020, the fields had been struggling for years. Sod that once took two or three years to reach harvest was taking three or four. Weeds, grubs and fertilizer bills climbed, even as he followed the same program his father used, with better seed and better inputs.

Struggling to find the problem led him to discovering the benefits of regenerative agriculture. That is when he stopped plowing harvested fields and began planting cover crops. He also made a few other key changes.

Today, his operation is more productive, more profitable, and he has turned what was a downward trend into an upward spiral.

He shared his story in a Farm Forum videoconference hosted by the Quebec Farmers' Association last month. Read about it on Page 11. And watch a recording of the forum by going to the QFA website at quebecfarmers.org.

Quebec farmland values up 6.2% so far in 2026

Brenda O'Farrell
The Advocate
– Local Journalism Initiative

Agricultural land in Canada continued to gain value in the first half of 2026, with the upward pressure boosting prices in Quebec over the national rate of increase, according to the latest figures released by Farm Credit Canada earlier this month.

The value of farmland across the country increased by an average of 3.8 per cent in the first six months of the 2026. This pushed the year-over-year upward trend in land values to 7 per cent for the period from July 2025 to June 2026. This rate of increase was slightly slower than what was seen in the previous year.

In Quebec, the value of agricultural land gained much more, increasing by 6.2 per cent in the first half of the year, ranking the province in the Number 2 position among provinces in terms of farmland value increases. Only in Prince Edward Island did farmland prices increase more in the first six months of 2026, where prices spiked by 11.9 per cent.

Agricultural land in Alberta and Manitoba increased in value by 5.3 per cent, while in Ontario, the hike was more modest, at 2.4 per cent. Land prices on average dropped in British Columbia by 1.9 per cent.

"Growth eased from the 9.3-percent gain recorded at the end of 2025, but farmland values remain far from dirt cheap," said analysts with the FCC.

See FARMLAND, Page 7.

Just the facts

61%

The United States is Canada's largest agri-food trading partner, accounting for more than 61 per cent of our exports and more than half of our imports.

Source: Canada The National Food Security Strategy, June 2026

34% - 52%

In an attempt to estimate how much of the cost of a Thanksgiving meal actually goes to the farmer, a breakdown shows that 34 to 52 per cent of the average value of a turkey purchased at a Canadian grocery store ends up with the farmer. This translates to a seven-kilogram turkey, as an example, selling for approximately $46 would return about $20 to the farmer. The remaining $26 goes to processing, packaging, transportation, distribution and retail costs.

Sources: Farms.com and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

31%

That is Canada's food price inflation since January 2020. It is comparable to other G7 countries, including the United Kingdom, which saw food prices jump 39 per cent in the same timeframe; Germany, 39 per cent; Japan, 31 per cent; the United States, 32 per cent; Italy, 31 per cent; and France, 27 per cent.

Source: Canada The National Food Security Strategy, June 2026

16%

That is how much the Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) estimates global corn yields will drop by 2050 due to climate change, with rice and wheat yields slipping by 7 per cent. This will result in global price increases of 26 per cent for wheat, 28 per cent for corn and 31 per cent for rice.

Source: Canada The National Food Security Strategy, June 2026

TILTING AT WINDMILLS



THE ADVOCATE

These windmills are in St. Remi in the Montérégie area southeast of Montreal. They are among a total of almost 2,000 power-generating windmills across 45 wind farms in the province, which, according to Hydro-Québec generate roughly 4,000 megawatts of power. That is enough power to supply an estimated 3 million homes. Hydro aims to add another 10,000 MWs of wind power by 2035.

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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News





THE ADVOCATE
Garnet McClelland, age 11, shows his satisfaction at picking apples in Ste. Anne de Bellevue at Macdonald Campus in early October, where the Cortland trees were laden with fruit and the Empire apples were just starting to ripen.

Rain credited for Quebec's great-quality apple crop

Andrew McClelland
The Advocate
– Local Journalism Initiative

Quebec's apple orchards headed into picking season with high hopes, according to the Quebec Apple Growers Association, which says this summer's soggy weather has actually been a blessing in disguise.

Federation president Éric Rochon acknowledged the rain wasn't popular with the public. For growers, though, it was exactly what was needed.

"Regular rainfall has made for an extraordinary season for us producers," said the orchard keeper from St. Benoît de Mirabel.

Last year was a different story.

"By August we were experiencing heat waves, extreme heat and, above all, drought," Rochon told *The Canadian Press*.

While reports have been good, don't expect a record haul. The estimated volume is 5.7 million minots – a measure equal to 42 pounds (around 19 kilograms) of fruit. That's average, and just shy of the roughly 6 million projected in the federation's latest annual report.

What the weather boosts, Rochon explained, is the quality of the fruit itself. Paulared, Sunrise and Lobo started coming off the trees in early September, with the ever-popular Honeycrisp beginning later in the month.

A changing climate is also changing what growers plant.

Rochon pointed to the Gala, a variety that "could barely withstand" the winters of the 1980s and 1990s. Not any more.

"We're still in Quebec, yes. And there can still be very harsh winters – we know that," he said. "But right now, in recent years, winter is arriving a little later and spring a little earlier."

With a trade war with the United States still looming in the background, Rochon is asking shoppers to "pay closer attention to the origin … of the fruits and vegetables they buy."

Quebec orchards currently account for nearly 55 per cent of apple sales in the province's grocery stores. Growers want to push that to 70 per cent by planting newer varieties like Gala, Ambrosia and Honeycrisp, but that kind of modernization doesn't come cheap.

"It's important to understand that when a grower wants to plant a new orchard, they necessarily have to uproot part of their existing orchard," Rochon said.

That means lost income and production. New trees then take four to five years to bear substantial fruit. Growers have been asking for a provincial modernization program for years.

Good year Canada-wide

Quebec isn't alone. In Nova Scotia, the story is one of recovery. Heavy rain in 2024 and drought in 2025 held back crops across the province, but this season's conditions have turned things around, and the Nova Scotia Fruit Growers Association says the apple harvest is up by roughly 500,000 bushels.

Peter Elderkin, who produces apples in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, doesn't hide his satisfaction.

"We have a good crop," he said. "The quality of the crop is the best I've had in years."

The same wet growing season has paid off in Ontario, where crowds are filling orchards around Barrie.

Morris Gervais, the owner and operator of Barrie Hill Farms in Springwater, Ont., said the reports he's hearing from producers are encouraging.

"Across Ontario I'm hearing reports that the apple crop is really good," he said in a media interview.

Gervais calls it an above-average year, with bigger fruit.

"The Honeycrisp are just entering into their prime," Gervais said. "The size is excellent because of all the rain, and now these cool nights and sunny days, they are colouring up really, really nicely."

Up the road in Clarksburg, Tom Ferri of T and K Ferri Orchard has seen plenty of seasons in his 40 years in the business, and he likes what he's seeing.

"Cool nights and sunny days. Like 20 or 22 degrees and six or eight degrees at night. That's the perfect recipe," Ferri said.

Now the job is getting the fruit from the orchard to the kitchen table, and Ferri has a simple pitch: "We want people to buy Ontario apples. We would also hope they would buy Georgian Bay apples."

News

Farmers in Quebec, Ontario



Brenda O'Farrell
The Advocate
– Local Journalism Initiative

Hundreds of farmers and residents from rural communities across Quebec and eastern Ontario staged a massive rally in Rigaud last month demanding the federal government halt its plans for the proposed Alto high-speed train from Quebec City to Toronto.

The protest featured a parade of farm equipment and attracted a variety of supporters, including Quebec Conservative leader Éric Duhaime, who made a campaign stop to lend his voice calling for the project to be halted.

But the most poignant pleas to stop the multi-billion-dollar proposed project came from the handful of farmers in Rigaud and neighbouring Pointe Fortune who said the project threatens to destroy their farm businesses, their livelihoods and strip them of their homes that – in some cases – have been in their families for generations.

"Today, I'm proud to be a farmer," said dairy producer Daniel Legault, who hosted the protest at his farm in the western reaches of Rigaud near the Ontario border.

Legault's farm stretches across 1,200 acres that straddle the Quebec-Ontario border. He addressed the crowd while standing on a trailer that served as a stage set up in front of a barn that houses his 200-head dairy herd.

The proposed train – and its trajectory that appears slated to cut through the northwestern corner of Vaudreuil-Soulanges – "is ripping the fabric of this region," he said.

"Our community will not come out of this," he warned before explaining what it will mean for his family farm, a business he has seen expand through five generations, since 1929.

Though no precise route for the rail line has been confirmed, a map obtained from Alto shows the general trajectory of the line cutting through his farm. The electrified track, which will allow trains to travel at speeds of up to 300 kilometres an hour, will be fenced on both sides, making level crossings to allow farm equipment to travel over them impossible.

Legault has described the infrastructure that could sever his farm as a "Berlin Wall."

If part of his farm is expropriated to allow the project to be built, it will no longer be profitable, he said, as rally participants stood in front of two large farm buildings, representing just some of the investment he has made in expanding his operation over the years.

According to Jérémie Letellier, president of the Union des producteurs agricoles' Montérégie federation, about five farms in the Vaudreuil-Soulanges region will be impacted, while about 500 more will be affected in the province.

"We had projects for our farm, for our family, for our future," said Pointe Fortune farmer Pascale Montesano as she addressed the crowd at the protest. "All of this today has been paused. How do you continue to build a future if no one can tell us that tomorrow if what we have will still be ours?"





THE ADVOCATE

Jérémie Letellier, president of the Union des producteurs agricoles' Montérégie federation addressed the protesters Sept. 19.

News

protest against Alto train

"If the train comes through, it's finished for us," Montesano said in an interview with *The Advocate*.

She and her husband raise bison and boars, and operate an apple orchard on 52 acres. They received their first notice from Alto this spring. Last week, she received another that included a satellite image of her farm that indicated where Alto would like to test the soil on her farm.

Alto wants to buy her land, she said. It's an option she is not interested in.

"We will fight – fight until we have nothing to fight," she said.

Karine Bercier, a farmer from nearby of St. Isidore, Ont., who is also a certified public accountant, urged landowners at the gathering not to wait until they receive an expropriation notice to start asking questions.

"Talk to your accountant. Talk to your lawyer," Bercier said. "Preparing for expropriation does not mean accepting expropriation. We hope none of us ever needs any of this planning. We hope our opposition makes a difference."

The protest was held after Alto confirmed in September that it had acquired a property along the proposed corridor. It did not, however, offer any details. The Crown corporation is expected to announce the precise route of its proposed train line this fall.







THE ADVOCATE

Hundreds turned out to a protest at a farm in Rigaud, near the Ontario border, on Sept. 19 to call on the federal government to halt the proposed Alto high-speed rail project between Quebec City and Toronto.

The latest on project's cost

Brenda O'Farrell
The Advocate
– Local Journalism Initiative

A new report issued earlier this month from the federal Parliamentary Budget Office says the proposed Alto high-speed rail project could cost between $75 billion and $113 billion – a range that is substantially higher than original estimates.

The budget watchdog based its analysis of the costs on similar projects carried out in other countries.

The initial estimates of the Alto project for a rail line between Quebec City and Toronto were pegged between $60 billion and $90 billion.

Meanwhile, Alto says it is considering adding a stop along the route in Kingston, which would increase costs even more.

The features of the project driving costs upwards are the number of tunnels and elevated structures required along the 1,000-kilometre route that promises to allow travellers to go from Quebec City to Toronto in about three hours.

According to the report, based on figures obtained from similar projects carried out in other countries, a kilometre of tunnel cost $169 million, while each kilometre of elevated tracks would add $153 million to the total.

The Parliamentary Budget Office based its calculations on high-speed rail projects built in Europe, the United Kingdom and the U.S.

QFA Editorial



GALDRIC PS/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Farmers rely on diesel fuel for absolutely everything. How much more of the increased cost can we keep absorbing?



John McCart
QFA President

When will diesel crisis end?

Farmers and consumers can only shoulder so much of increasing costs

During the early stages of the COVID-19 epidemic, back when the world of travel was shutting down, the cost of on-farm diesel dropped to almost 50 cents a litre. That event brought back fond memories of when I started farming, when the cost of red farm fuel was in the 40-cent-a-litre range.

Fast forward 36 years, and we are now in a crisis of short supply that affects absolutely everything.

My last fill-up of farm fuel was almost at $2.50 a litre!

Yes, I receive the taxes back, but I need to pay them first.

A year ago at this time, I paid $1.25 a litre. The cost has almost doubled in a year.

Today, I operate a small cash crop farm. I practice minimum tillage and wonder where I can cut corners on fuel use. But there are no other solutions. In order to cultivate, plant, spray and harvest, I will use diesel fuel. More will be used to trim weeds and brush, and soon to move snow. I can totally understand the challenges facing large farms with big tractors that burn almost 100 litres per hour.

Canadians knew very quickly that the second term of the Trump presidency was going to be trouble for us.

The current U.S. administration does not seem to have a playbook it can follow that makes any sense to the rest of the world. I am sure that average American doesn't know what is going on or more importantly, what is coming next.

Since the start of the Iran war on Feb. 28th, fuel prices have been on everyone's mind. On a recent trip to Montreal, I saw the price of gas at $2.00.9 cents a litre. I am fortunate enough to live in Grenville, five minutes from Hawkesbury, Ont., where the price was $1.59.9 the last time I filled up on the Saturday of Thanksgiving weekend. Up until just a few years ago, the price of clear diesel at the pump was always 10-20 cents cheaper than regular gasoline. Not any more. Diesel in Grenville was $2.89.9 this past weekend, while motorists in Ontario could fill up for 30 cents less.

I have mentioned before that farmers rely on diesel fuel for absolutely everything. I have paid surcharges on deliveries of fertilizer this spring, and the cost of everything from the custom combine operator to the cost of shipping the grain will go up dramatically. The farmers who produce beef, pork, grain, vegetables, etc., must all bear the increased cost of transport. There is no method for us to increase the value of the product as it leaves the farm.

Producers operating under supply management have a formula to factor in the cost, but ultimately, the consumer will have to pay more. There will be a point where they can no longer be able to do so. The prices in the grocery stores are already too high. I also don't know how residents will be able to afford home heating fuel.

So, when will this latest crisis end?

I do not have an answer. Will the U.S. mid-term elections change things or make them worse? We will see in a few weeks. The war has destroyed so much infrastructure in the Middle East, it will take years to rebuild. The low stockpiles of fuel will take years to replenish.

Farmers will be in this for the long haul.

Perhaps our newly elected provincial government has a solution.

News

UPA sets new dues for 2027 to 2029

Andrew McClelland
The Advocate
– Local Journalism Initiative

The Union des producteurs agricoles has settled the numbers behind its overhaul of how members pay union dues.

At a special meeting convened Sept. 16, the union adopted the base and supplementary assessments that are to take effect Jan. 1, 2027. These rates are not set to be approved by the *Régie des marchés agricoles et alimentaires du Québec* (RMAAQ), which must ratify the plan.

According to the proposal approved by the UPA, the base assessment charged each farm buisiness will be tied to a farm's gross income rather than its legal structure. The previous single and double rates will be abolished. As announced earlier this year, farms with income under $100,000 will pay $450 in 2027, while those that generate $100,000 or more in income will be assessed dues of $980.

What's new is the schedule that follows for subsequent years: a 2.6-per-cent annual indexation in 2028 and 2029, as set out in the UPA's 2025-2029 financing plan. That takes the two base amounts to $461 and $1,005 in 2028, and $473 and $1,031 in 2029.

The supplementary assessment, which applies only to farms that earn at least 25 per cent of gross income from products not covered by a joint plan, is indexed the same way. Its six tiers, which run from $50 to $2,500 in 2027, will reach $52 to $2,631 by 2029. The charge is calculated only on income from products outside joint plans.

The UPA is also adding an alternative method for the supplementary assessment. When a farm receives its notice, a producer can ask to be charged 95 cents per $1,000 of gross income from products outside joint plans, rather than the fixed tier. They will need to supply official proof of revenue, and the request is subject to approval by the RMAAQ.

A long road to reform

The changes have been years in the making. The UPA long argued that the *Loi sur les producteurs agricoles*, in place since 1972, stood in the way of calculating dues by farm size or income. That obstacle was removed in November 2023, when Bill 28 amended the Act. After consultations with members in 2025, delegates adopted a resolution of intent at the December 2025 general congress. September's special meeting put the figures on it.

The UPA maintains the goal is not to raise its revenues. The changes, it says, are meant to meet funding needs already planned and to spread the cost more evenly, so that farms outside joint plans contribute alongside those covered by them. The contributions collected through joint plans stay in place and currently account for 35 per cent of the union's funding, according to the UPA.

Amounts adopted by UPA on Sept. 16, 2026

Base assessment

Gross farm income	2027	2028	2029
Under $100,000	$450	$461	$473
$100,000 or more	$980	$1,005	$1,031

Supplementary assessment

Applies to farms with 25% or more of gross income from products outside joint plans. Calculated on that income only.

Gross farm income from products outside joint plans	2027	2028	2029
$0 to $99,999.99	$50	$51	$52
$100,000 to $249,999.99	$175	$179	$184
$250,000 to $499,999.99	$375	$384	$394
$500,000 to $999,999.99	$750	$769	$789
$1 million to $1,999,999.99	$1,500	$1,539	$1,579
$2 million or more	$2,500	$2,565	$2,631

Amounts for 2028 and 2029 reflect 2.6% annual indexation. Source: UPA

What farmers need to know

The June 30 deadline for the mandatory income declaration has passed, but the UPA says its online declaration site remains open, exceptionally, for farms that missed it. Those that never file will be assigned an income tier, which the UPA says could be the highest.

The union has also spelled out what counts as gross farm income. It includes farm-gate sales, processed farm products and income insurance payments, such as ASRA and crop insurance. It excludes agrotourism; animal boarding; custom work, like snow removal; land rentals; goods bought for resale; and forestry sales.

FARMLAND: Land still far from 'dirt cheap:' FCC

From Page 1

In Quebec, where the year-over-year gain for the period of July 2025 to the end of June 2026 was 8.1 per cent – the third-highest gain in the country in that timeframe, behind P.E.I and Alberta – analysts said "the appetite for farmland remained strong," although uneven across the province.

"Demand is strongest for productive, well-located land, while higher input costs, tighter margins and regional supply constraints are making buyers more selective," the FCC report stated.

Earlier this year, the FCC published its annual analysis of farmland sales recorded in 2025. It showed the value of farmland in Quebec jumped by an average of 4.8 last year, an annual increase that was below the national average of 9.3 per cent.

Provinces	Average % Change		
	Jan 2026 - June 2026 (6 months)	July 2025 - June 2026 (12 months)	Jan 2025 - Dec 2025 (12 months)
BC	-1.90%	-3.90%	-1.70%
AB	5.30%	9.40%	11.40%
SK	2.60%	6.70%	9.40%
MB	5.30%	6.00%	12.20%
ON	2.40%	3.20%	2.20%
QC	6.20%	8.10%	4.80%
NB	2.10%	3.20%	9.10%
NS	3.60%	5.30%	1.60%
PEI	11.90%	17.60%	8.50%
Canada	*3.80%*	*7.00%*	*9.30%*

FARM CREDIT CANADA

This chart shows the change in average farmland values change in the first half of 2026 by province.

Dominican Republic reopens its markets to Canadian beef

Brenda O'Farrell
The Advocate
– Local Journalism Initiative

Canadian beef producers have regained access to export to the Dominican Republic ending a 23-year ban.

The announcement was made Sept. 11 by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. The decision restores access to this Caribbean market, which has a population of 11.6 million, for the first time since 2003. That is when Dominican Republic authorities imposed the ban after Canada reported its first case of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), also known as mad cow disease.

The reversal of the ban came after an audit of Canada's beef inspection system, carried out by livestock and food inspectors from the Dominican Republic. Three Canadian beef processing facilities have been approved to export to the country, including two in Alberta and one in Manitoba.

"The Dominican Republic is an important and growing market in the Americas, and reopening access creates new opportunities for our farmers and processors to expand their reach, strengthen their operations and support jobs across Canada," said federal Agriculture Minister Heath MacDonald in a statement.

Last year, the Dominican Republic imported about $215 million in beef and beef products from countries around the world.

"This is a meaningful breakthrough for Canada's meat sector, opening the door to new export opportunities, greater market diversification and growth across the entire supply chain," said Kyle Larkin, president of the Canadian Meat Council.

News



THE ADVOCATE

Pointe Fortune Mayor Sandra Lavoratore was among the crowd Sept. 19 at a protest in Rigaud demanding the Alto high-speed rail project be halted.

Train will be 'death' of Pointe Fortune: Mayor

30 high-speed trains a day could race through tiny village

Brenda O'Farrell
The Advocate
– Local Journalism Initiative

"It's going to be the death of my village."

That stark prediction came from the mayor of Pointe Fortune last month as she was asked to describe the impact the proposed multi-billion-dollar Alto high-speed train project to link Quebec City with Toronto will have on her little town – the second smallest municipality in the Vaudreuil-Soulanges region west of the island of Montreal.

That is, of course, if the federal Crown corporation runs its tracks through this little town tucked up by the border of Ontario and the Ottawa River.

"I think it's going to kill the town," Mayor Sandra Lavoratore said in an interview following a public information meeting in neighbouring Rigaud last month to discuss the rail plan. Then, she immediately paused, acknowledging the full weight of her statement.

"How are we going to survive this? How are we going to fight this?" Lavoratore added.

Cut a town in two

She repeated the same questions at a large protest on Sept. 19 in Rigaud organized by farmers demanding the train project be halted. She was the only mayor in the Vaudreuil-Soulanges region who attended the rally that attracted provincial politicians from the campaign trail and hundreds of farmers from rural communities across Quebec and eastern Ontario that could be affected by the Alto plan.

"I'm here to support the farmers," Lavoratore told the crowd at the protest. "But I'm here to save my town," she added to applause from those gathered.

Lavoratore said she first learned of the plan for the high-speed rail project possibly cutting across her little town last January through media reports.

Residents wait and worry

Although no precise route of the rail line has been announced, a map obtained from Alto provides a general trajectory of the first phase of the line – between Montreal, Laval and Ottawa – that indicates it could cut through a corner of Pointe Fortune and western Rigaud. Alto is expected to unveil a more precise, narrower outline of the route sometime this fall. Until then, residents and farmers in the wider area wait and worry about being expropriated. Many of them have received notices from Alto asking permission to access their land to conduct soil tests.

Lavoratore said she is joining forces with other municipalities in the MRC of Argenteuil, across the river from Pointe Fortune, that also fall within the proposed trajectory of the train route. She hopes that together they can hire a lawyer to help inform residents of their rights if and when it comes down to expropriation notices being sent out.

But in the meantime, her town and its residents are caught in a waiting game. She has asked Alto for a list of properties that might be touched by the train's route. The Crown corporation said that list is confidential.

So last spring she turned to social media and went door to door to inquire if residents had received notices. Some had, others hadn't. Although, she has been told notices were received throughout the month of September.

Desperate and discouraged

"To have – they tell us – up to 30 trains a day that will pass through Pointe Fortune. What do you think will happen to our little village?" she asked, then paused again.

But it is not just those whose land will be touched by the train who will be affected, she said.

Attempting to calculate the full impact has to be done knowing the scale of the town itself. Pointe Fortune only has 641 residents and a tiny geographic footprint.

The municipality is only a little over six kilometres long, stretching along the Ottawa River, and about 1.5 kilometres large, covering less than 9.5 square kilometres.

"We're all going to hear it. We're all going to see it," Lavoratore said of a train running along a fenced track at speeds of up to 300 kilometres an hour. "It's not discreet."

"The impact is major."

And it is already being measured in a variety of ways.

People are worried about their property values, she said. One resident even asked her if she should go ahead with plans to upgrade her windows.

"I've seen people cry," Lavoratore continued, referring to residents wondering what will happen. Will they be uprooted? Forced to move?

Could affect development

There are only about 260 homes in Pointe Fortune. But there are plans for it to grow. A developer has submitted a project to build 150 townhouses on vacant land just east of the village centre, she said. That many new homes could increase the municipality's population by 50 per cent, and give its tax base a huge boost. It's a big deal for the municipality. But the developer has received a letter from Alto, Lavoratore said. The Crown corporation, she was told, is interested in buying his land.

For now, the approval process for the housing development is going forward with the town's urban planning department, Lavoratore said. But there is no guarantee any new homes will be built at this point. She is waiting for Alto to announce the precise location of the rail line. "Then, we will take it from there."

Lavoratore is heart-broken about the possible fate of her town, which has a rich history that traces its way back to the early days of the fur trade.

Geography is key

Its location – at a narrow point in the Ottawa River – is what sparked the original settlement of people. It was recognized as a trading post around 1750. It also marks the spot that delineated the boundary between Upper and Lower Canada before the time of Confederation.

The first post office under the English name Point Fortune was established in 1851. And almost 30 years later, in 1880, it was formally recognized as a village. Yet, it was only in 2023 – three years ago – that it was granted the full status as a municipality.

Throughout this time, its population has gone from 264 in 1901 to the high it is today – 641, according to the Quebec government's official 2026 count. It has had 26 mayors, including Lavoratore, the first woman mayor. Now, she fears she might be the last, but is quick to point out that there will be another election before construction of the first phase of the Alto project is set to begin in 2029.

The future for Pointe Fortune, right now, will all depend on what Alto decides. Will the town's location – at that fortunate point where the river narrows making it an attractive spot for a small population to take root more than 275 years ago – be the feature that also seals its fate, becoming the desired site for the train line to trace its way across the waterway and signal its end?



THE ADVOCATE

Landowners are making their views about the train project known.



THE ADVOCATE

The sign at the western edge of Pointe Fortune marks the border between Quebec and Ontario.

Editorial



FILE PHOTO

Among the promises made by PQ leader Paul St-Pierre Plamondon is to withdraw Quebec from the Alto high-speed rail project between Quebec City and Toronto.

After the election:

Drawing a roadmap for agriculture and forestry



Martin Caron
UPA President

On Oct. 5, Quebecers voted for change in an election that resulted in the province's third minority government in the last 19 years. The Union des producteurs agricoles congratulated Parti Québécois leader Paul St-Pierre Plamondon and his team on their victory and acknowledged the dedication shown by all elected candidates, across political parties.

I would also like to congratulate the other party leaders – Charles Milliard, Éric Duhaime and Ruba Ghazal – on their victories in their respective ridings. The interest shown by all party leaders in forestry and agriculture is a welcome acknowledgment of the importance of our sector.

I would also like to thank former premier and outgoing leader of the Coalition Avenir Québec, Christine Fréchette, and the former CAQ agriculture minister, Donald Martel, for their meaningful contributions to several issues that directly affect agricultural producers.

Importance of food sector

During the campaign, we emphasized that the agri-food sector generates lasting wealth that directly benefits local communities, drives regional development, and strengthens Quebec's economic resilience.

We highlighted the most pressing issues facing agriculture and forestry, including adequate support for the sector, a firm commitment to protecting agricultural land and activities, and a business environment that fosters competitiveness.

All five major parties put forward promising proposals on these issues, but the PQ's commitments are, of course, of particular interest. These include increasing agricultural funding from 0.9 per cent to 1.5 per cent of government spending over 10 years, fully protecting agricultural land and activities, and adopting a zero-net-loss principle.

PQ made list of promises

St-Pierre Plamondon and his team also pledged to withdraw Quebec from the Alto high-speed rail project between Quebec City and Toronto, provide $10 million in financial support to the UPA-Fond Action, an agricultural trust, in 2027–2028, protect an additional 50,000 hectares of sugar bushes in public forests and offer long-term loans at favourable interest rates to finance the purchase of farm assets.

The new government has also pledged to set a target of ensuring that 75 per cent of all public-sector procurements are Quebec products, make carbon cost reimbursements permanent and available to all agricultural businesses, have La Financière agricole du Québec help lower interest rates for agricultural businesses, reduce the administrative and regulatory burden on agricultural businesses, and uphold the pledge that the annual volume of timber made available comes from public forests.

We will be reaching out to the PQ leader and his team soon to develop an action plan on all these issues.

Alto promise is pressing

The high-speed rail issue is particularly urgent. The new government must quickly and unequivocally make good on its promise. This is especially pressing given that a majority of elected representatives now oppose the project, which would deeply disrupt agricultural lands and forests as well as all rural communities along the route.

Throughout the campaign, we stressed that agricultural and forestry businesses are strategic assets for Quebec. Their long-term viability, along with that of other parts of the agri-food sector, is essential to food autonomy and security for Quebecers. We are fully committed to working with the government and opposition parties on these issues.

The Forum Report

How one Pontiac sod grower rebuilt his soil

Andrew McClelland
The Advocate
– Local Journalism Initiative

For almost 50 years, Mountainview Turfgrass in the little town of Quyon in the Pontiac region has grown the kind of grass that ends up on golf courses, sports fields, even on the lawn of Parliament Hill. But Jared Hamilton, the farm's fifth-generation owner, says the best crop he has grown lately is the soil itself.

"Nothing in my education, nothing from my agronomic reps, taught me about soil biology. Zero," Hamilton told the participants of a videoconference last month hosted by the Quebec Farmers' Association. "There's a rabbit hole of information, but if you single it down, it's about growing the biology in the soil instead of focusing on growing the plant."

The Hamilton family has farmed in Quyon since the 1800s, when William Hamilton left Ireland during the potato famine and eventually bought land there. Jared's grandfather moved away but kept the farm as a weekend retreat and a spot to keep a flock of sheep.

Then, in 1977, Jared's father Bill left teachers' college after noticing how much sod from an Ottawa-area farm was being sold into Quebec. He seeded 13 acres of bluegrass. The first sod was harvested in 1978, and Mountainview Turf was born.

Today, the farm covers a little more than 700 acres. Regular bluegrass goes to the Ottawa Valley, while specialty bentgrass for putting greens has travelled as far as Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia. The farm also offers sports field aeration, supply and install crews, and a retail store for seed, soil and mulch.

Soil depletion

Hamilton and his sister Lindsay bought out their parents in 2020, but he says the fields had been struggling for years. Sod that once took two or three years to reach harvest was taking three or four. Weeds, grubs and fertilizer bills climbed, even as he followed the same program his father used, with better seed and better inputs.

"My soil analysis said our NPK was great, our pH was fine, our organic matter was OK," Hamilton said, referring to the needed macronutrients, including nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. "Every year it was, 'What am I doing wrong?'"

The answer arrived after 2024, which Hamilton calls the worst year of his life. His mother and father-in-law were both fighting cancer. His harvester operator left in May, just ahead of the eight-week stretch when the farm earns 40 per cent of its annual revenue. With a 19-year-old harvester that only he could run, Hamilton was cutting sod at midnight and 1 a.m., finishing by 7, working his other businesses all day and coaching his kids' fastball team. That year, he cut sod until Nov. 27.

"It really felt like a prison sentence," he said.

Seeing what was missing

But being forced to look at his struggling fields every day showed him what he had been missing. That August, while in Ottawa for a hockey tournament, he happened upon Gabe Brown's book "Dirt to Soil: One Family's Journey Into Regenerative Agriculture." He read it in a week.

"Every single thing that man wrote was exactly what was happening to us," Hamilton said. "I had finally found what the problem was."

That fall, he stopped plowing harvested fields and planted cover crops instead. He started making compost on the farm from wood fibre, spent hay, grass clippings and manure from the farm's egg operation, tracking temperatures to get the recipe right. He built a compost extractor from a 1,000-gallon tank to spray living microbes onto the fields.

A new plan

Since then, every field gets at least a year's rest under a blend of eight to 13 species, including sorghum-sudangrass, sunflowers, clovers, vetch, cowpeas and radishes. Instead of plowing, Hamilton now uses a new agricultural rototiller to mix compost and cover crop residue into the top few inches of soil, rather than burying it. His soil is only four to six inches deep above hardpan, he explained. Deep ploughing was mixing subsoil into the topsoil.

The old program was input-heavy. Hamilton would plow and disc a harvested field, apply a 13-15-17 pre-plant fertilizer at 450 pounds per acre, then seed Kentucky bluegrass at 70 pounds per acre. From there, the crop needed about 160 pounds of synthetic nitrogen a year over five to seven applications, plus twice-weekly mowing and herbicide to keep the sod weed-free.



JARED HAMILTON

Jared Hamilton of Mountainview Turfgrass in Quyon had to make some drastic changes to his soil after nearly 60 years of intensive sod growing.

Compost now does much of that work. Applied at 15 to 25 tonnes per acre, it supplies three to five times the phosphorus and potash of the old pre-plant blend, which matters because turf, like hay, strips potash from the field every time it is cut. Cover crops have nudged soil pH up by 0.1 to 0.2, and Hamilton's compost tests at 7.4. Turf is comfortable between 6 and 6.5. For the extract, five five-gallon buckets of compost go into the tank, circulate for 30 minutes, and goes into the sprayer the next morning, ideally ahead of rain.

Livestock followed.

Cows and sheep were added

In 2025, Mountainview brought in two cows, six sheep and a guardian dog – the first grazing animals on the farm in 40 years. This year the herd has grown to nine Belted Galloway cows and 40 Katahdin sheep, rotationally grazing a 10-acre parcel of his worst land. Hamilton hopes to reach 30 to 40 cows and 100 sheep.

And he's getting results. Hamilton has gone from roughly 70 to 75 per cent sod yield to about 90. The farm moved to 100-per-cent natural fertilizer this year and no longer spends about $130,000 annually on synthetics. This fall, bluegrass seed is germinating in eight days instead of the usual 20. And the earthworms that had vanished from harvested fields are back.

"One of the fields that had a 100-per-cent crop failure is now full of worm castings on the surface," he said. "That alone has told me it's working."

It didn't come easy

The change wasn't painless. Older fields weaned off synthetics looked stressed, and Hamilton had to green them up with feather meal before harvest. He also faced doubt from his own crew.

"The person spraying on the field goes, 'Really? You really think this is going to do something?'" he said. "You have to have a lot of faith, and you've got to be ready to take some criticism."

Hamilton frequently shares his farm practices on Facebook. But he points out he's not offering a prescribed plan for others to follow.

"I'm not going to stand on a soapbox because it's a long way down from that pedestal," he said. "I'm just trying to share what's working for us."

Mountainview's turnaround is still young, and Hamilton says he's still learning. But he has no doubt about the direction.

"We're still on a journey," he said. "I will not go back. I refuse. It has to get worse before it gets better, and then it will be better than it's ever been."

Trends in agriculture



ALBERTA ARCHIVES/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Every year it seems food prices go up, while there are fewer farmers in our midst.

Has it been a 'good year?'



Chris Judd
The Advocate

Each fall when I meet my non-farming friends, they always ask: "Was it a good year for crops?"

They ask, not because they're nosey, but because, as consumers, they are truly concerned about how the farmers are getting along. We all notice food prices go up and, every year, there are fewer farmers.

Imported food has to travel hundreds and thousands of kilometres. Fuel is expensive, and big transport trucks use a lot of fuel. The "food dealing" middleman likes to move grain and other commodities all over the world, because there is a markup every time something moves.

Sixty-five years ago we had an agriculture teacher in school who told the class: "The longer a farmer can keep a crop or animal in his hands, the more money he makes."

He knew 65 years ago that every time anything changed hands, someone took a little profit. And it continues to this day.

The older a country gets, the more specialized farmers and other middlemen get. And everyone wants a "piece of the pie."

We are not alone

Europe has been there, and farmers are trying to get back.

In the U.S., billionaires are still trying to "keep their foot in the door." Much of the farm growth in the U.S. comes from enormous "investment farms," which sometimes have 10,000 milk cows. Rich investors can buy shares in these farms, using "for-farms-only" ways to invest, receiving better tax write-offs in return. It's a way of deferring taxes until they "cash in" their investment or some better tax write-off comes along. Some shady characters also use investments to "launder money" and don't worry about getting any interest.

Back to Canada.

Our farmers were worried all summer about a lack of moisture, low heat units, hail storms and new invasive weeds. Some fields of winter wheat that were planted last fall didn't tough the winter very well, and there was considerable winter kill. The first cut of hay was much lower yield than normal. Whether the summer rain and heat came at the right time between hay cuts or not determined the yield of the following hay cuts.

Weather always a challenge

Farmers are used to weather changes and unforeseen problems with crops, but the corn crops finished a little early this year, and the yield of corn sileage was above normal.

On our farm there is less haylage in the bunk silos, but lots of dry hay in big bales because when hay gets too dry for haylage, just wait a few hours and it makes excellent dry bales.

The last few years have been great to make extra big dry bales, and they keep well in a barn. There is an extra bunk full of corm sileage and a fourth cut of haylage. Hail damage was "spotty" throughout the county and some farmers had some damage on one farm, but the other farm was OK.

In the farm's vineyard, wind and a hail storm blew down trees and the winery's sign. Hail stones that hit a grape bust it open, spreading its juice over the bunch. This raises concern about fungus, the attraction of bees, bugs and wasps. After grape picking for a few days, the actual damage will be known.

There is a new predator in the grapes this year. As the sugar content increases in the grapes, which is necessary to make good wine, the coyotes begin to eat the grapes. Some grape varieties are ready to pick now. If the sugar content in the grapes is too low, some extra sugar must be added to make tasty wine. Only sugar made from "pure sugar cane" is used, and some years none is needed.

Bright spots

This year, there was the largest 4-H club in Shawville ever. Members competed in several "Valley" fairs and will also compete at the Royal. Some 4-H members have travelled to other provinces and purchased "prize willing" calves to help keep Shawville animals known throughout the country. Recently, there were a few Canadian dairy exhibitors who took dairy cattle to the World Dairy Show in Madison, Wisconsin, and brought home several "grand champion banners." (Something else for Trump to complain about!)

Yes, the year has had many "glitches" to worry our farmers. But we have good reason to celebrate and enjoy the full display of colour to be found all over this special place in the world.

Farm Forums

Save the date!
Beekeeping, Family and Highland Cattle



WEDNESDAY, OCT. 21, 7:30 P.M.

With Syed Mohamed of WB Gold

When Syed Mohamed and his wife Nancy Lanteigne bought a farm in West Bolton two years ago, they were expecting bees – not the dozen Highland cattle the seller casually mentioned on the day they signed.

Join us to hear how two Montreal city-dwellers built a thriving apiary, expanded their honey production and learned cattle farming on-the-fly with help from their neighbours.

Zoom link: https://us02web.zoom.us/launch/jc/83319237854
Meeting ID: 833 1923 7854
Passcode: 222091

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

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

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

Signature .....

Date .....

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.

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.

Doreen Tryon, Magog

Werner Stierli and Jeannette Rickenbach, West Brome

Thyra Tolhurst, Howick



The Miner Report

Is dairy industry ready to rethink how we feed calves?

Abby Allen
William H. Miner
Agricultural Research Institute



MAKIENI/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

More and more research suggests that traditional calf-feeding programs may not fully support the biological potential of these calves.

For decades dairy calf nutrition programs have been built around compromise: to provide enough milk to support calf growth, while restricting milk intake to stimulate early starter feed consumption and rumen development, ultimately for an earlier weaning. This approach has made the calf-rearing process relatively predictable and economical, but is it the right answer? Are we missing out on the true biological potential of modern dairy calves?

In a recently published JDS Invited Review, Dr. Ghaffari and Dr. Hammon critically analyzed decades of research to understand what happens when we elevate whole milk or milk replacer (MR) consumption well beyond the standard 8 to 10 per cent of calf body weight or approximately 4 to 5 quarts per day, to feeding rates of 8 to 12 litres per day or ad libitum feeding approaches. This review takes a comprehensive look at the effects of these intensified systems on growth biology, behaviour and welfare, rumen development and starter intake concerns, health, economics and long-term performance. It provides an important framework for reconsidering what we have traditionally viewed as the "right" answer.

If calves are biologically capable of consuming more milk than traditional feeding programs provide, perhaps our perspective should shift. Rather than focusing on limiting milk allowance to encourage earlier starter consumption and weaning, we should consider potential gains and losses of providing greater milk allowances.

Is enough milk being fed?

Historically, restricted milk programs were often used to reduce reliance on liquid feed and promote starter intake, but modern feeding strategies are increasingly evolving to support higher milk intakes and later weaning ages to better align nutrient supply and growth potential. Yet, an important question still remains: Are we feeding enough milk to maximize on calves' biological potential?

Research has shown that calves on restricted milk allowances consistently display indications of chronic hunger through behaviours like increased vocalizations, longer standing times and frequent unrewarded visits to automated feeders. In one study, calves offered milk ad libitum consumed 89-per-cent more milk than restricted calves and gained 63-per-cent more weight during the pre-weaning period, resulting in a 10.5 kg body weight advantage by 35 days of age. Although both groups exhibited similar rates of gain during the weaning and post-weaning period, the ad libitum fed calves maintained a greater body weight through the end of the study, demonstrating that increased milk intake supported enhanced early growth without negatively impacting later performance and adaptation to solid feeds.

While increased average daily gain (ADG) is often viewed favourably, the biological significance of that gain extends well beyond body weight alone. A pound of gain can be varying proportions of lean tissue, fat deposition, organ development and skeletal growth. What makes up that gain matters, and current research is painting a clearer picture of requirements in maintaining equilateral calf growth, not just fat deposition.

It's not only about weight gain

In their review, Ghaffari and Hammon draw on the work of the research, emphasizing that the goal of early life nutrition practices should be formulating diets to support the developmental trajectory that optimizes body size and composition, as well as future milk yield, rather than simply focusing on maximizing average daily weight gain. This consideration becomes particularly important as we consider feeding more milk in the pre-weaning period.

Elevated feeding programs have been shown to improve feed efficiency of pre-weaned calves, largely because nutrients from milk or milk replacer are more digestible than those from solid feed. As these calves consume and utilize more nutrients to support accelerated growth, diets need to be formulated accordingly. Increasing energy supply alone is not sufficient; protein and energy must be balanced and continuously adjusted based on body size and targeted average daily gain to support organ, skeletal and lean tissue development.

So, what does this look like in the calf?

When milk allowances increase, starter intake generally decreases. Although, it is important to note research has found minimal differences in starter consumption within the first three weeks of life when comparing conventional and elevated systems because overall intake of starter is low and in either feeding scenario solid feed intake is supported mostly through the milk or milk replacer. Nonetheless, the functional development of the rumen still relies on solid feed fermentation to transition to microbial protein synthesis and avoid the post-weaning slump we dread. This is where the balance of the diet becomes critical.

Biological potential is key

As Ghaffari and Hammon describe, total intake levels need to be considered alongside macronutrient composition to maintain an appropriate protein-to-energy ratio, while recognizing that the calf's capacity for protein accretion changes over time and is not unlimited.

This is not a question of whether milk or starter feed is more important. Instead, the goal is to develop a nutrition program that supplies sufficient milk allowances to support a calf's biological potential while simultaneously encouraging adequate starter intake prior to weaning. Achieving this balance requires attention not only to starter quality but also the calf's ability to consume it in meaningful amounts to support development of the rumen.

Equally important to this is the weaning strategy we implement. If we still expect calves to wean primarily based on age, milk solids should gradually be decreased as we approach that age target. This encourages starter consumption and helps ensure that nutrient intake remains adequate, minimizing post-weaning slumps and drops in average daily gain. Ultimately, weaning should be viewed as a transition, rather than a date on the calendar, especially when implementing an elevated feeding program.

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.

Climate of change

Adopting new farm practices often function of many factors

Popular goals that trigger changing how to do things: profits, soil health

Christopher Bonasia
The Advocate
– Local Journalism Initiative



WILLIAM EDGE/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Research showed the process that stretches from learning about a practice to implementing it on the farm can take four to seven years – or even longer, especially if it requires a large capital investment.

Understanding how producers access and trust information can help agrologists encourage adoption of best management practices, explained a researcher in a recent webinar.

"Being able to identify and understand different types of producers, and how they need different information at different times, can be really beneficial," said Matt Blackshaw, a Behavioural Science Fellow with Impact Canada, a Privy Council initiative that provides data analytics and behavioural science input to measure impact.

Blackshaw spoke during "From information to implementation," a webinar hosted by Farmers for Climate Solutions' FaRM Resilience Mentorship program, about how farmers learn about and adopt new best management practices (BMPs), and the role agrologists play in that process. He used the term "agrologist" broadly to include all professional advisers, like agronomists, extension agents and crop advisers.

Producers asked

The findings came from research that took place in spring of 2024 to gather responses from more than 1,000 Canadian producers across all 10 provinces.

The research showed the process from learning about a practice to implementing it can take four to seven years – or even longer, especially if it requires a large capital investment.

After the initial stages of gathering information, producers who adopt BMPs are often then triggered to action by different events, including seeing a practice up-close to get a better sense of its benefits and impacts, or experiencing something bad happen as a result of a current practice – like wasting money before switching to a variable rate program or losing soil after a significant storm.

Events trigger change

In other cases, producers are prepared for adopting a BMP after extensive research, when an opportunity – like a spike in input costs, or a new government program – makes it more possible.

Producers reported that different goals were important when making on-farm decisions about new practices. The most popular goal, reported by more than 70 per cent of respondents, was stable profits and economic success, while soil health followed as a close second. More than half of producers listed extreme weather adaptation as important, more than for climate change mitigation in general. The lowest goal was public recognition, with only 6 per cent of producers saying it was important.

Big farms have specific concerns

Economic stability and soil health became even more important among farms with higher revenue. Blackshaw noted that while those two goals are important for most farmers, "they're especially important for the biggest farmers, whose adoption choices may have the greatest effects on the rest of the ecosystem."

But whether farmers take action to adopt BMPs is determined by a range of other preferences and access to information. It was shown that 44 per cent of farmers said they prefer familiar practices, even if they are less economically efficient. This indicates that other values are considered along with economic gain. Uncertainty or the lack of sufficient information played a role in whether farmers see the risks of new BMPs as too high to be worth adopting, Blackshaw said.

Also important is where producers get information from, and how it is delivered. More than 40 per cent of producers listed websites as one of the first places they look to when considering a new practice, while traditional media events and other farmers were secondary. But website use remained the same among producers who did or did not adopted new BMPS, while those who have already adopted BMPs were more likely to attend in-person events.

Learning part of process

Interactive learning opportunities – like events, one-on-one advice and peer-to-peer networks – can support a better exchange of information and opportunity for agrologists to better understand what producers want to learn to be comfortable exploring next steps, Blackshaw added.

Producer responses also showed a difference in what information sources are most used, and which are most trusted. When asked who they trust the most when considering new practices, peers, family, agrologists and other advisers were listed as the most trustworthy – indicating that different sources of information are weighed differently at different steps along the path to BMP adoption.

"When it comes time to actually implement, (producers are) going to want to involve somebody that they know," Blackshaw said. "This is someone that they really want to be talking with – learning from, getting advice from – to help with that implementation."

Lactanet – Canadian Network for Dairy Excellence

Reducing dairy herd methane using data and analysis

Guillaume Masse
and
Louis-Étienne Lessard
Lactanet

Measuring is the first step toward improvement. Thanks to the Méthane Québec project, dairy producers now have a new indicator that allows them to monitor enteric methane emissions from lactating cows using a bulk tank milk sample.

And even better, it is now possible to simulate different management strategies and identify those that reduce emissions while also improving profitability.

Data to measure enteric methane

In recent years, reducing greenhouse gas emissions has become an important topic in discussions about the future of dairy farming. Among these emissions, enteric methane represents a significant share – approximately 50 per cent – of the environmental footprint of dairy farms. Until recently, however, it was not possible for producers to continuously monitor their animals' actual emissions without specialized research equipment.

This is precisely the challenge the Méthane Québec project aims to address: making something intangible into something tangible, giving every producer a starting point.

The project, carried out through a collaboration between *Les Producteurs de lait du Québec* and Lactanet, now makes it possible to estimate enteric methane emissions directly from a bulk tank milk sample. This approach provides a simple, low-cost method that can be applied on a large scale to monitor changes in methane emissions across dairy herds.

Model development

The model developed as part of the project is based on a large database collected from 14 Quebec dairy farms over a two-year period.

Methane emissions were first measured using specialized equipment (sniffers). These measurements were then related to the infrared spectrum of bulk tank milk, which is routinely measured in Lactanet laboratories.

Using thousands of measurements, an artificial intelligence model was developed to estimate the enteric methane emissions of lactating cows in a herd using only bulk tank milk samples.

The objective is not to measure methane with extreme precision, but rather to obtain a reliable indicator that can be used to monitor herd trends over time and observe the effects of changes in the barn on overall herd emissions.

Monitoring every two days

One of the major advantages of this approach is the frequency of measurement.

Without requiring any additional action from producers, results are estimated directly from bulk tank milk analyses performed every two days, on average. This provides a dynamic picture of methane emissions from lactating animals on the farm and allows producers to compare their results with the provincial average.

Unlike a one-time measurement, this frequency makes it easier to monitor the effects of dietary changes and seasonal variations or specific events occurring on the farm.

A new tool available

All dairy producers can now access their results directly through their extranet. Results are presented as grams of methane per kilogram of milk corrected for fat and protein.

The objective is to help producers understand where they stand relative to the average. As with all management indicators, medium-term trends provide the most useful information for decision-making.

From measurement to action

Measurement is an essential first step. However, the real value of data emerges when it can be used to guide management decisions.

That is precisely the role of SimHerd.

Developed in Denmark and used for several years in other countries, SimHerd is a dairy herd simulation model recognized for its ability to assess the technical and economic impacts of different management strategies.

The model reproduces the operations of a complete dairy farm while taking into account, among other things:

- reproductive management
- heifer-rearing quality
- feed efficiency
- animal health

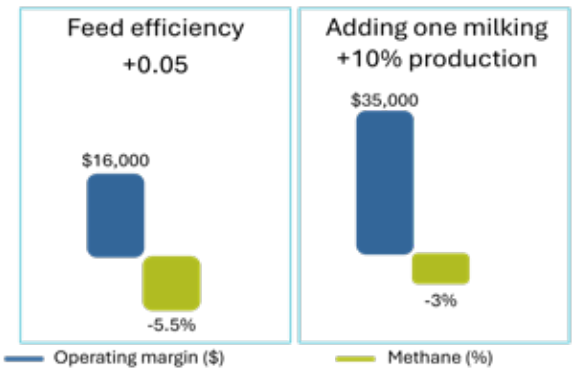
Each scenario is then simulated over a five-year period to estimate its impact on the farm's overall profitability over the medium term.

Thanks to the Méthane Québec project, Lactanet has adapted the SimHerd model to the Quebec and Canadian context and incorporated methane emissions. This makes it possible to simultaneously assess the economic and environmental effects of different management strategies.

In other words, it becomes possible to answer a question many producers are asking: Is it possible to improve farm profitability while reducing methane emissions?

The answer is yes.

FIGURE 1



In one simulation, a modest improvement in feed efficiency – the ability of an animal to convert feed into milk improved the operating margin by approximately $16,000 and reduced methane emissions by approximately 5.5 per cent for the entire herd.

Compare several strategies

One of the major advantages of SimHerd is its ability to simulate different strategies using farm-specific data, without taking risks on the farm

For example, a relatively modest improvement in feed efficiency – the ability of an animal to convert feed into milk – can have a significant impact.

In one simulated scenario, increasing feed efficiency by 0.05 points among lactating cows improves the operating margin by approximately $16,000, while reducing methane emissions by approximately 5.5 per cent for the entire herd.

Another example involves adding one milking per day.

In this simulated scenario, an increase of approximately 10 per cent in milk production can generate an economic gain of approximately $35,000, while reducing methane emissions by nearly 3 per cent.

This strategy is based on a relatively simple principle: if fewer cows are needed to produce the same amount of milk, both expenses and emissions are reduced.

These examples clearly illustrate that there is no single universal solution.

Some farms will benefit more from improving feed efficiency, while others may have more to gain by improving reproduction, herd health or longevity.

This is precisely why customized simulations are so valuable. They make it possible to identify the best strategy for maximizing the annual margin while reducing the farm's enteric methane emissions.

The objective is therefore not simply to reduce methane, but rather to identify strategies that improve the overall efficiency of the production system through the implementation of an action plan.

More than a decision-support tool

It is important to remember that SimHerd does not replace the expertise of advisers.

Rather, the model provides an estimate of the likely consequences of different strategies based on the farm's own data.

The results can then support discussions between the producer, feed adviser, veterinarian, management adviser and any other professionals involved in the success of the operation.

This approach supports better-informed decisions adapted to each farm's specific circumstances.

What's next?

Methane represents an important component of a dairy farm's greenhouse gas emissions (approximately 50 per cent of emissions) but it does not represent the entire carbon footprint of milk.

The work carried out as part of the Méthane Québec project is directly connected to an even more comprehensive approach: carbon footprint assessments.

Unlike an indicator focused solely on enteric methane, a carbon footprint assessment takes into account the farm's overall greenhouse gas emissions, including manure, crops, purchased inputs and carbon storage.

This comprehensive approach will ultimately make it possible to identify the strategies offering the greatest environmental benefits while taking into account the economic and geographic realities of dairy farms.

In the meantime, the new tools developed through Méthane Québec already represent an important step forward. They allow producers to measure their performance, take action and, most importantly, assess the economic impacts of different strategies over the medium term before implementing them, while encouraging multidisciplinary collaboration.

Grains

Corn yield, inventories up, while wheat stats down

Ramzy Yelda
Senior Market Analyst
Producteurs de grains du Québec

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's monthly grains report for October is downright bearish for corn, showing a significant increase in yield and inventories in the United States.

Corn inventories in 2026 increased by 173 million bushels (MBU) to hit 2,095 MBU. Yield increases hit 181.2 bu/ac, up from 178.5 bu/ac. Production increased by 234 MBU, to 16,034 MBU, which is 5.5 per cent below last year's record level.

Corn for animal consumption and ethanol use increased by 50 MBU, while exports increased by 25 MBU.

The 2027 inventories increased by 282 MBU, to reach 1,849 MBU.

The average producer price decreased by 10 cents/bu to $4.70/bu, compared with $4.16/bu in 2025-2026.

Soybean inventories in 2026 decreased by 10 MBU, to hit 315 MBU. Yields increased from 52.8 bu/acre to hit 53.1 bu/acre. This meant production increased by 27 MBU to reach 4,562 MBU – representing 7.1-per-cent more than last year.

Crushing is up by 10 MBU, while inventories in 2027 are increased by 5 MBU to 315 MBU.

For wheat, the area seeded is down by 200,000 acres, and yield is up to 48.1 bu/acre from 47.8 bu/ac, leaving production virtually unchanged at 1,534 MBU. This represents a 22-per-cent drop from last year, however.

Wheat imports are up 5 MBU, livestock consumption is up 10 MBU and exports are down 25 MBU.

Wheat inventories in 2027 increased by 23 MBU to 740 MBU, compared with 920 MBU in 2026. The average producer price decreases by 10 cents/bu to $6.30/bu or from $5.06/bu in 2025-2026 with all wheats combined.



Quebec farms open their doors

On Sunday, Sept. 13, the Producteurs de grains du Québec participated in *Portes ouvertes sur les fermes du Québec*, the agricultural open house event organized by the Union des producteurs agricoles.

The PGQ communications team hosted a booth at the Ferme Brasserie Schoune in St. Polycarpe, west of the island of Montreal, where about 50 visitors stopped by despite the iffy weather.

In the Mauricie region, the Grain Caravan welcomed nearly 450 people to Ferme Agrikel in Yamachiche. On hand was Quebec singer and radio host Marie-Ève Janvier, who was also the official spokesperson for *Portes ouvertes* events.

In all, seven grain-producing farms in six regions of Quebec opened their doors to visitors. A big thank you goes to all the producers involved in the success of this event.

Webinar on markets

During a webinar held Sept. 24, Étienne Lafrance, a market information officer with the PGQ, was joined by Jean-Philippe Boucher from Grainwiz to provide an update on the most recent harvest estimates in North America, as well as the trends currently affecting grain markets.

The 50 participants were also able to interact with the speakers and get answers to their questions about marketing their crops. If you missed it, you can replay it on the PGQ's YouTube channel.

Fall Zoom call

On Sept.16, the PGQ held its *Zoom de la rentrée* (fall Zoom call), a free virtual information session for all grain producers. The 80 or so participants in this event received news on current issues, like the Regulation respecting agri-environmental practices (RPAE) and new production costs. They also heard two specialized presentations. The first was on the western bean cutworm (WBC) given by Julien Saguez, Ph.D., a researcher with the Grain Research Centre (CÉROM). Public affairs specialist Mathieu Santerre offered a brief analysis of the statements made by political party leaders during their visit election campaign stops at UPA headquarters.

This annual event was a great opportunity for grain producers across Quebec to get informed, ask their questions, and head into the next season better prepared.

Réal Fredette Award: nominations open now

Nominations for the 2027 Réal Fredette Award are now open. This year's theme is *"Une entreprise innovante"* (An Innovative Business). With this award, the PGQ seeks to highlight a field crop business that is both a leader and an inspiration in the grain industry, and which stands out for its vision, boldness and ability to transform tomorrow's challenges into opportunities for progress.

Nominations can be submitted until Dec. 15. The nominated business must then submit the completed nomination form no later than Jan. 19, 2027.

The Réal Fredette Award, named in honour of the organization's founding president, was presented for the first time in 2025. The PGQ marked its 50th anniversary by recognizing excellence in production among its members.

PRODUCTEURS DE GRAINS DU QUÉBEC

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

The Resourceful Naturalist



Paul J. Hetzler
ISA Certified Arborist

Every wonder how birds of a feather do the 'flocking together' thing?



LESTOLENA/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Red-winged black birds exhibit what is called synchronous flocking behaviour – the collective action that allows them to fly in perfect fluid synchrony like a school of fish. It's a captivating performance to witness.

In every part of Canada, the onset of autumn is heralded by a flurry of colours. No matter where you live, bright yellow school buses emerge from hibernation caves to ply the roads again. The leaves of most kinds of deciduous trees turn colours – lots of red and orange in the southeast, and plenty of dazzling gold up north and out west. And in much of the country, the flashy vermilion wing patches of red-wing blackbirds can be seen as they flock together to rehearse aerial acrobatics routines before heading south for the winter.

I wonder if kindergarten teachers and other types of cat-herders are jealous of the way Canada geese organize themselves, youngsters included, into nifty V-shaped formations without any apparent squabbles. However, with all due respect to migratory geese, as well as to teachers who somehow get preschool kids to form a straight line for more than two seconds, blackbirds get the prize for teamwork. If you have ever seen a flock of blackbirds turn, climb and dive in perfect fluid synchrony like a school of fish, you know how captivating these performances are.

The term blackbird is broad, and includes species that aren't entirely black, like the brown-headed cowbird. With several million of them in nesting season here, many of us have seen these shameless brood parasites who outsource their parenting by laying their eggs in the nests of other bird species. We also have plenty of grackles that span the country. There are other flavours of blackbirds as well, like the invasive European starling. My favourite is the red-wing blackbird.

If you look at a range map for red-wing blackbirds, their breeding grounds stretch across most of Canada. They include the southern portions of the Yukon and Northwest Territories, all of Alberta and British Colombia, most of Saskatchewan, and then dips southward in a band that extends as far east as Newfoundland.

You can also hear them

I've always lived where winters tend to hang on well into April, and it does my heart good to see a flash of red wing patch – with a splash of yellow – and hear their brazen "conk-a-chee" calls in late March when snow still covers the ground. Maybe that's why I like them so much.

Part of my land is a marsh where red-wings nest among cattails in relative safety from predators, like raccoons and foxes. I recall canoeing with my young daughter through cattails one spring, peering into red-wing blackbird nests while adults hovered overhead, objecting loudly and diving close to our heads. Though marshes afford red-wings protection from four-legged critters, hawks and owls take a toll on blackbirds regardless of where they nest.

They travel at night

Considering that red-winged blackbirds are one of the most abundant birds in North America, it seems odd we don't often notice their migration. Migrating geese are hard to miss – their chevron-shaped flocks catch our eye, and their loud honking let us know what's up, so to speak. But blackbirds tend to travel at night, and their calls don't carry far.

In late summer they form flocks, and while it's sad to see them leave for the winter, it's also fun to watch thousands of them dip and weave as a cohesive unit. This is called synchronous flocking behaviour.

One fall morning years ago, a small flock of perhaps a few hundred redwings took a break from stunt-flying and poured into a big sugar maple in my yard. A few minutes later, I watched in awe as they flowed up out of that tree in a tight stream, and then gracefully poured themselves down into another large maple nearby like an avian hourglass.

People have long wondered how large groups of birds – flocks of redwings can number more than a million – manage to stay in sync without a lot of bumping into each other. In recent years we've made some progress thanks to high-speed cameras, algorithms, computer modelling and brain imaging. Although we're closer to solving this mystery, no one claims to have all the answers.

Flocking has been studied

One piece of the puzzle came about 10 years ago, when biologists found that each bird in a flock keeps track of its seven closest neighbours and coordinates its movements with them. No matter how many times they turn or dive, they maintain about the same distance between themselves and the seven closest birds.

In late 2025, researchers from the University of Konstanz and the Max Planck Institute of Animal Behavior in Germany discovered a neural basis for flocking behaviour. They found there is something called a "ring attractor network" in the brains of most animals, which may account for flock synchrony more than any other explanation. My understanding is that it's a literal ring of neurons that are only firing in one small region or "activity bump" at a time. This so-called activity bump instantly changes position on the ring depending which way the animal turns its head.

According to the scientists who studied this ring-attractor network, when birds gather in large groups, their neural rings sync-up, which allows for spontaneous and collective movements. The scientists also think that birds probably still use their senses to track their seven closest peers, and their brains integrate that information with what's happening in the neural ring. Whether this is the complete solution to the mystery of flocking remains to be seen.

In the words of an Italian ornithologist deeply involved in studying starling flock behaviour in Rome: "The exact way (flocking behaviour) works, no one knows." I like an honest researcher.

Farm Forums

Save the date!

The State of Play in U.S.-Canada Trade Negotiations for the Agri-Food Sector



WEDNESDAY, NOV. 18, 7:30 P.M.

With Michael Harvey

What stability can there be for Canadian producers in a world tossed and turned about by Donald Trump?

The ongoing trade war between Canada and the U.S. can make farmers who rely on exporting south of the border very nervous indeed. What will happen?

Michael Harvey has been following tariffs, trade and turmoil very closely. Appointed by Prime Minister Mark Carney to the Advisory Committee on Canada–U.S. Economic Relations, Harvey has been executive director of the Canadian Agri-Food Trade Alliance (CAFTA) since July 2023.

In this talk, Harvey will discuss how tariffs and trade wars have affected Canadian food exports – and what might happen in the near future.

Zoom link: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83959664224?pwd=USoGO6vRaDUmgfwYgtKSrTaJieJsxx.1
Meeting ID: 839 5966 4224
Passcode: 448505



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

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

Cookin' with the Advocate

Braised Sausages with Navy Beans



CYNTHIA GUNN, THE ADVOCATE

The recipe for this dish comes from a wonderfully reputed restaurant in the U.K., a cozy, unassuming tiny pub and restaurant that has been serving meals since 1891.

Ingredients

6 thick excellent quality pork sausages (about 500-600 grams)
3 tbsp olive oil
2 medium onions
3 garlic cloves
2 tsp fresh thyme leaves (or ½ tsp or more dried)
2 bay leaves
400g tomatoes
1 tbsp gochujang
haricot (navy) beans, about 2 cups

Preparation

In a wide, heavy-based pan over a medium heat, brown the sausages in the olive oil. Keep an eye on their progress, turning them over, little by little, until they are nicely burnished all over. This can take up to 20 minutes. Remove the sausages and set aside, retaining the fat and caramelized juices in the pan.

While the sausages are cooking, peel and roughly chop the onions and peel the garlic.

Warm the empty sausage pan over a low to medium heat, stir in the chopped onions and leave to cook for a good 25 minutes, till soft and pale gold. They will need stirring from time to time.

Thinly slice the peeled garlic, chop the thyme leaves and stir into the onions with the bay leaves. Leave to cook for another 10 minutes while you roughly chop the tomatoes.

Stir in the tomatoes together with the gochujang and a light seasoning of salt and black pepper, drop in the bay leaves then leave to simmer until the tomatoes start to release some of their juices.

Drain the beans and stir them in.

Then, leaving the sausages whole or cut into short lengths, as you wish, tuck them among the onions and tomatoes. Let the casserole simmer for 20 minutes, then serve piping hot.

Source: The French House, Soho, London, United Kingdom, though unconfirmed.

Almost perfect meals often start in smallest, most imperfect places

Cynthia Gunn
QFA's Food Writer

My town's general store is the best place to buy groceries. Some citizens never shop there, declaring it to be more expensive, or not carrying the products they want. I've price compared and found this to be not true for most products. And 95 per cent of the things I buy on a regular, almost daily basis can be found there. But that's not the best bit.

Recently I was reminded, once again, how lucky we are to have such a place. Upon walking in the door, I was immediately transported back home, 50 years ago. What greeted me was the strong and luscious aroma of countless chickens being roasted in the upstairs kitchen to make their pot pies for the busy upcoming long weekend. For a moment I felt my breath catch – how I longed to be able to walk into my warm and secure childhood home on a drizzly autumn day. This moment was followed almost immediately by a 10-minute conversation with another villager who pulled me right back into the present. It is rare to not have one of these casual meetings while there, the type of vital connection that is missed at big stores.

There is a cozy, unassuming tiny pub and restaurant in Soho, London, in the U.K., that has been serving people since 1891. Last year, restaurant critic and former editor of the *Evening Standard* David Ellis wrote a review of this establishment, which is called the French House. He mused about life, and that he had "learnt flawlessness can bore and there is currency in the blemishes. It follows that the places I love and associate with love … are not flawless either."

The French House, he declared, is among the brigade of favourites. It doesn't show off. It "wants you to have what you actually like … and you will leave paying what is fair."

He concluded by stating that it is fun, trustworthy and reliably always there.

I will add that it does not play music, preferring the sound of human interaction.

I feel every neighbourhood could benefit from a restaurant and pub like that. Our general store feels a bit like that as well.

When I come across a recipe that appeals at the moment that it presents itself to me, I often bookmark it, or tear it from the paper and use it as a bookmark. If it's online, I may copy it and paste it, somewhere. Such is the case with this recipe. The problem is, I copied the recipe, and the restaurant it was made in – the French House – but I seemed to have missed who wrote the article, and what they called the dish. I tried to find it online again, but to no avail. So, know that it was made at some point in the last year at the French House, and whoever ate it, loved it and was privy to the recipe. Or, perhaps they tried to reproduce it at home?

Incidentally, I looked up gochujang: it is a Korean savoury, sweet, spicy fermented chili paste. It seems an unusual addition in this context. Siracha, or a mix of siracha and miso, is suggested as a substitute. You could regard it also as "optional," making sure not to go light on the garlic and herbs. Haricot beans in the U.K. are what we would refer to as navy beans, and I've given an approximate amount, as their tins are different sizes than ours. I used ²/₃-cup dry navy beans that I cooked with bay leaves for an hour until soft before adding them to the dish. I used 1½ cups diced tomatoes with the juices in place of fresh tomatoes.

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.

The Classifieds

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YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED TO THE

Quebec Farmers' Association Annual General Meeting

Friday, Nov. 13, 2026, 9:30 a.m.
At the Faculty Lounge, Macdonald Campus of McGill University in Ste. Anne de Bellevue

The QFA will present its annual Warren Grapes Fund scholarships

How to apply for a scholarship:

If you are a Quebec resident enrolled in an agriculture or silviculture program at the college or university level or a Canadian resident from outside the province who is enrolled in an agricultural or silviculture program at a Quebec college or university, you are eligible to apply.

Write an essay of 400 to 600 words describing your experience and interest in agriculture. Highlight your motives for entering the industry and your aspirations for the future. Feel free to let us know what you would do with your scholarship prize.

Submit your essays by email to qfa@upa.qc.ca

Deadline: Monday, Nov. 2, 2026 at midnight.

For more information, email your questions to: qfa@upa.qc.ca