

March/April 2007

# AgriSuccess

JOURNAL

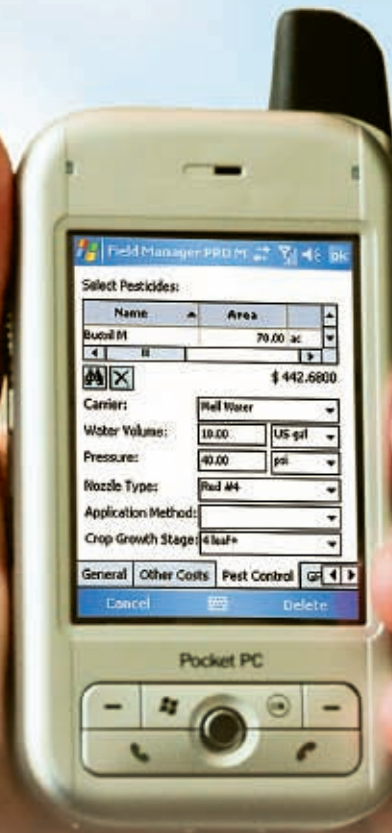
Is direct marketing for you?

Insights from Canada's Outstanding Young Farmers

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**Just like 1972:**  
Grain prices ramp higher

Some observers believe growing demand for biofuels will mean sustained strength for grain prices



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**AgriSuccess**  
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March/April 2007

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On the cover:

Larry Weber is a grain broker  
and market analyst in Saskatoon,  
Saskatchewan.

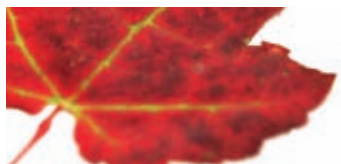
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# Letter from the editors



FROM KEVIN HURSH AND ALLISON FINNAMORE

**P**aradigm: (noun) an example serving as a pattern.

We may be seeing a paradigm shift in the market for grains and oilseeds. Biofuel production has ramped up rapidly. Substantial quantities of cereals and oilseeds are being channelled into ethanol and biodiesel in countries around the world.

This relatively new demand is having a big impact on grain prices. Some analysts are comparing it to the price boom that started in 1972. While some believe this to be a new paradigm, others are treating it as just a temporary bull market.

With marketing as the theme for this Journal edition, the relationship between grain prices and biofuel demand was a natural issue to explore. Beyond the obvious importance for grain producers, there are also wide-ranging implications for the livestock feeding industries.

What happens with world grain markets is beyond our control as individuals. Many of the other stories in these pages deal with marketing issues that you can influence. There's growing interest in direct marketing and we have a story that provides practical advice on how to make that work.

We'd also like to note that the Canadian Farm Business Management Council is hosting a Marketing Caravan throughout the country this spring, with workshops on direct marketing for producers. Check their website, [www.farmcentre.com](http://www.farmcentre.com), for details.

Your story ideas and comments are always welcome. You can e-mail us through [info@agrisuccess.ca](mailto:info@agrisuccess.ca), or call 1-888-332-3301.

**AgriSuccess**  
JOURNAL

## This month's contributors

**Kevin Hursh, Editor**  
Kevin is a consulting agrologist, journalist and broadcaster based in Saskatoon, Sask. He also takes an active role in the management and operation of a grain farm near Cabri, Sask.

**Allison Finnamore, Associate Editor**  
Allison specializes in cultivating words. Based in New Brunswick, she has written about agriculture for 15 years, contributing to publications nation-wide and working with industry to promote farming. She is immediate past president of the Canadian Farm Writers' Federation.

**Owen Roberts**  
Owen, a native of Mitchell's Bay, Ont., teaches agricultural communication at the Ontario Agricultural College, University of Guelph and is director of research communications for the university. He is also a freelance journalist and broadcaster.

**Peter van Dongen**  
Peter is an agricultural journalist and communications consultant based on Vancouver Island. Born and raised on a dairy farm, Peter is a Professional Agrologist with work experience on many different types of farm operations.

**Hugh Maynard**  
Hugh is a specialist in agricultural communications based in Ormstown, Que. A graduate in farm management from Macdonald College (McGill University), Hugh is a seasoned farm journalist and broadcaster.

**Rae Groeneveld**  
Rae is Farm News Director at CX 94 radio station in Yorkton, Sask. He has extensive knowledge of agricultural issues in Western Canada from his years of behind-the-scenes work in the industry.

**Lorne McClinton**  
Lorne has worked in the communications field for the last 20 years as a journalist, photographer, scriptwriter and corporate writer. He divides his time between Quebec and his grain farm in Saskatchewan.

**David Schmidt**  
David is associate editor of Country Life in B.C. and contributes to various regional and national agricultural publications. He grew up on a mixed/dairy farm in the Fraser Valley. He was named B.C.'s Agriculturist of the Year for 2000.

The editors and journalists who contribute to AgriSuccess Journal attempt to provide accurate and useful information and analysis. However, the editors and FCC/AgriSuccess cannot and do not guarantee the accuracy of the information contained in this journal and the editors and FCC/AgriSuccess assume no responsibility for any actions or decisions taken by any reader of this journal based on the information provided. The views expressed in this journal are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the editor or FCC/AgriSuccess.

AgriSuccess Journal is a magazine dedicated to helping producers advance their management practices by providing practical information, real-life examples and innovative ideas that foster personal solutions.

# Block marketing for better returns

BY RAE GROENEVELD

A successful American model for marketing fed cattle is being attempted in Western Canada.

Last fall, 13 feedlot operators from across Alberta and Saskatchewan formed Northwest Consolidated Beef Producers (NWCBP). They are emulating Consolidated Beef Producers of the U.S. where feedlot membership has grown to about 230 and each week they market a consolidated pool of 50,000 head or more.

While the Canadian group won't reach the size of their American counterparts, they hope to build their membership to have 4,000 to 5,000 head to offer each week.

"Instead of having producers compete against each other – we'll have a little more consistency in prices and not the big ranges from one producer to the next," anticipated Will Lowe, Director of Member Relations for the NWCBP.

"We work it more of a U.S. style where we actually ask for a price (for the listed cattle). It is more than just taking bids and I think it will put some power back into producers' hands."

NWCBP has a number of different membership options. For more information go to: [www.nwcbp.com](http://www.nwcbp.com).

## Publications on legal risks faced by producers

BY KEVIN HURSH

The Centre for Studies in Agriculture, Law and the Environment at the University of Saskatchewan has developed two publications dealing with producer liability. The publications are available free of charge in either English or French from the CSALE website at [www.csale.usask.ca](http://www.csale.usask.ca).

**A Producer's Guide to Risk Management and Due Diligence** provides an overview of the common risks producers face and identifies tools you can use to manage and cope with these risks. It deals with legal risk as well as the costs that arise outside of the operation of the law.

**On-farm Implications of Traceability Initiatives in the Canadian Agri-food Sector: A Guide for Farmers and their Legal Representatives** identifies some of the concerns producers have regarding traceability.

Funding support for the publications was provided by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

# Jeepers Creepers

BY DAVID SCHMIDT

Why settle for a three per cent return when you can increase margins to 25 per cent or more and still increase sales just by putting old plants in new clothes?

That, says John Schroeder of Valleybrook Gardens in Abbotsford, B.C., and Niagara, Ont., is the concept behind Jeepers Creepers and Rock Stars. The two plant lines each earned the nursery B.C. Landscape & Nursery Association marketing innovation awards.

Jeepers Creepers are 86 ground-cover perennials while Rock Stars are 150 "small cute hardy plants" for rock walls and container gardens.

Schroeder says Valleybrook has "always used the concept of increasing value through branding," beginning with Heritage Perennials in their distinctive blue pots. Jeepers Creepers and Rock Stars add a purpose-driven line of plants, distinctive packaging and complementary bench wrap, posters and brochures.

While Rock Stars has just been introduced, sales of Jeepers Creepers plants have increased 50 to 100 per cent in the past four years. Because the lines are sold only through garden centres, it sets those retailers apart from mass merchandisers.



# The Canada brand



BY KEVIN HURSH

**A**lmost half of Canada's agricultural production is exported either directly as primary products or indirectly within processed products. Unfortunately, international consumers don't know much about Canadian food products.

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) conducted market research with consumers and buyers in a number of Canada's key export markets. On the plus side, customers consistently think of Canada as a country with a pristine landscape and friendly, trustworthy people. They have the impression that Canada's food and agriculture products are fresh, reliable, safe and natural.

On the minus side, what the Canadian agriculture sector actually produces is not well known. Customers and buyers

## What the Canadian agriculture sector actually produces is not well known.

have trouble naming any specific Canadian food products. The research found that people's attitudes about our products tend to be based on their ideas of Canada as a country. Disturbingly,

those who have actual experience with our food and agriculture industry don't rate us as highly.

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, provincial governments and industry have developed a Canada brand and toolkit to help increase market share for Canadian food and agriculture companies. The brand is meant to deliver a consistent and positive message about our food products to international markets.

The tools include the Canada branding guide, with ideas for implementing the brand into export strategies using Canada brand graphics, photographs and promotional materials.

Companies and associations have to sign a usage agreement to access the graphic elements, and the whole initiative is much more than just slapping a maple leaf on exported products. Only Canadian entities can use the branding graphics and the products must be Canadian.

It's an initiative developed with a lot of thought and effort. In addition to the market research, there have been round tables with seven different food and agriculture sectors over the past three years. There have also been cross-country tours to get feedback and explain the process.

"We want people to understand that it's about service and the whole package," notes Janice Vansickle, executive director of branding management with AAFC. "We need to leverage strong points and work to correct our weaknesses."

For Gord Bacon of Pulse Canada, discussions on product branding served as a reality check. Pulse Canada is the market development arm for the country's producers of field peas, lentils, chickpeas and dry beans.

"We need to address some fundamentals first," explains Bacon. He notes that buyers of pulse crops are very price conscious and on-time delivery is key to customer satisfaction. "In many markets, we're viewed as dead last in terms of reliability due to transportation problems."

Pulse Canada is also conducting its own clinical studies to get more information on the health benefits from pulse crops. Promotion is easier once you have strong information.

Many associations and companies are seeing an immediate fit for the Canada brand initiative as part of their marketing strategy. "It can be used to bring us stronger recognition internationally," notes Vansickle.

Check out [www.brandcanada.agr.gc.ca](http://www.brandcanada.agr.gc.ca) for more information. ❖



# Insights from Canada's Outstanding Young Farmers

BY KEVIN HURSH

At the end of November and beginning of December, Canada's Outstanding Young Farmers program for 2006 was held in Saskatoon, Sask. The seven OYF regional honourees told of their struggles and successes.

From each, there are unique insights.

## Producing for the market

### Marc and Krista Schurman – Atlantic region

Marc and Krista have a 700-sow farrow-to-finish hog operation that is the first on Prince Edward Island to be certified as natural pork. The operation also includes a 300-head cattle feedlot and a greenhouse that specializes in tomatoes.

In April of 2004, the couple opened Spring Valley Farm Market to sell their own farm-fresh meats and greenhouse production. Tourism triples the population of the island in the summertime, so that's the prime time for making direct sales to consumers.

## Balancing farm, family and industry service

### Sylvie Gendron and Christian Lacasse – Quebec

Sylvie and Christian raise 125 head of purebred Holsteins including 50 milking cows. They have taken the farm from average milk production to the highest production in the region.

This has been accomplished while Christian served as vice-president of the UPA (Quebec's general farm organization) from 1997 to 2005. The responsibility took him away from the farm for up to 200 days each year, meaning the management of the farm and the raising of their four sons fell heavily upon Sylvie.

## The desire to farm

### Donald and Joanne Russell – Ontario

In 1995, after many cash flow projections, Don and Joanne finally gained the necessary financing to purchase dairy quota. The next three years saw them milking cows in a rented barn while commuting to their full-time jobs. In 1998, they bought their own farm through a mortgage agreement with the previous owners.

Don still does dairy nutrition work, trying out new technology on his own farm first. Through perseverance and hard work, Don and Joanne have accomplished what many people told them was impossible. They have established a first-generation dairy farm all on their own.

## Genetics and record keeping

### Albert and Michelle Rimke – Manitoba

As purebred Hereford cattle producers, Albert and Michelle know the value of strong record keeping. Only with good records can you know whether purebred cattle should be kept for breeding purposes to improve the breed.

For the past twelve years, they have also operated the Southwest Bull Development Centre. Bulls are sourced from various breeders and after a 112 day test period are sold at auction with the following data available: rate of average daily gain, weight per day of age, semen evaluation and expected progeny difference.

## Maximizing efficiencies

### Kenton and Pam Possberg – Saskatchewan

With a 13,000-acre grain farm, Kenton and Pam have a large operation even by Saskatchewan's standards. Keeping track of field locations, cropping history and grain inventory takes on added significance.

They credit their employees for a big part of their success.





The best example of efficiency is the seeding system. Back in 1998, when the operation was 4,500 acres, two air seeders were being used. Now the 13,000 acres are being seeded with one 65-foot air drill equipped with auto steer. The one-pass seeding system runs 24 hours a day during the busy seeding season.

**Eco-committed**

**Christoph and Erika Weder – Alberta**

Eco-committed refers to ecology, but also economics. Christoph and Erika Weder run a beef operation about six hours northwest of Edmonton in the Peace River region. Their grazing land has a high percentage of legumes that fix their own nitrogen. Grazing is intensively managed and the cattle are treated as “solar powered forage harvesters.” A partnership with Ducks Unlimited has helped the ranch build dams and restore natural habitat.

Christoph and Erika also have partnerships for the production and sale of alfalfa and grass seed. As well, they work with 17 other ranches to market natural beef under the Prairie Heritage Beef brand.

**Innovation**

**Pieter and Anita de Bruin – British Columbia**

Pieter and Anita de Bruin own Devan Greenhouses – 3.5 acres under glass located on a busy highway near Abbotsford. Over the years, they’ve strived to increase quality and consistency through the introduction of new technology.

They have automated watering for hanging plants, ebb and flow floors, loading docks, computerized climate control and an automatic planting machine. Rainwater is collected and recycled. Wood pellets, made from wood waste, are burned to provide supplemental heat. Devan Greenhouses is the only open-roof greenhouse in B.C. Pieter and Anita believe this results in a better quality and more natural plant.

From the seven couples, the judges picked two national winners – Donald and Joanne Russell of Ontario and Christoph and Erika Weder of Alberta.

You can read more on all the nominees and the entire Outstanding Young Farmers program at [www.oyfcanada.com](http://www.oyfcanada.com). ❖

Back row, l to r: Marc Schurman, Christian Lacasse, Sylvie Gendron, Donald Russell, Pieter de Bruin, Christoph Weder, Pam Possberg, Kenton Possberg and Albert Rimke.

Front row, l to r: Krista Schurman, Joanne Russell, Anita de Bruin, Erika Weder and Michelle Rimke.



# Just like 1972:

## *Grain prices ramp higher*

BY LORNE McCLINTON

Canada's grain and oilseed producers might be about to enter a new golden age. Biofuel, the Australian drought and a surprising drop in the USDA's October corn production estimates triggered a bull market on the world's grain markets, almost a year earlier than many expected. Market analysts were anticipating an ethanol-inspired bull market to develop in the near future, but most predicted it wouldn't start until 2007.

"I've told my students that they may never see this situation again in their lives," says Brian Oleson, head of the Agribusiness and Agriculture Economics Department at the University of Manitoba. "I have never seen this before. You have the third-largest corn crop on record, a gigantic crop, and we have the biggest bull market that we've had in the last 25 years."

**Consumption has outstripped supply in six out of the past seven years.**

The financial community has enthusiastically jumped on the commodity bandwagon but Doug Eadie, president of the Ontario Corn Producers' Association, is still taking it with a grain of salt. While the Ripley, Ont., farmer is pleasantly surprised by the rapid increase in corn prices from 2005's dismal level, he points out the industry is still reeling from years of low prices.

"People who have been in the game a long time tend to temper their enthusiasm," says Eadie. "If you look at what I got for corn in the late '70s and what it cost to grow then compared to the price now, the price of corn is not at all high. Still, it is refreshing to actually see some hope that there is opportunity to sell for reasonably good prices not just for one year but for at least two years out."

Larry Weber, a grain broker and market analyst in Saskatoon, Sask., says that unlike past bull markets, this one has no end in sight. Still, grain producers are not yet ready

to admit that good times are just around the corner. The memory of how the last price rally collapsed in 1996, after just a few months, is too fresh.

"The difference between 2006 and 1996 is that the '96 spike was a short-term run. The near-term values stayed high but the underlying futures really never moved," Weber says. "This time, when you go out and look at corn and soybeans futures markets one year, two years, three years down the road, you'll find they are going up in tandem. In 1996, it was a supply problem, today's market is demand driven; they are two totally different markets."

Oleson says the markets have finally woken up and noticed how much demand for corn and wheat has grown. Consumption has outstripped supply in six out of the past seven years. In 2006 alone forecasts showed that corn consumption would outstrip production by a billion bushels. With all the new ethanol plants coming onstream in the U.S. and Canada, the days of surplus grain production may be a thing of the past.

Recent forecasts show that global grain stocks will fall by 19 per cent, to 57 days of consumption at the end of the 2006-07 season. That's just one day more than the record low 56



days of supply set in 1972. Some predictions warn that levels could plunge to as low as 43 days at the end of 2007-08.

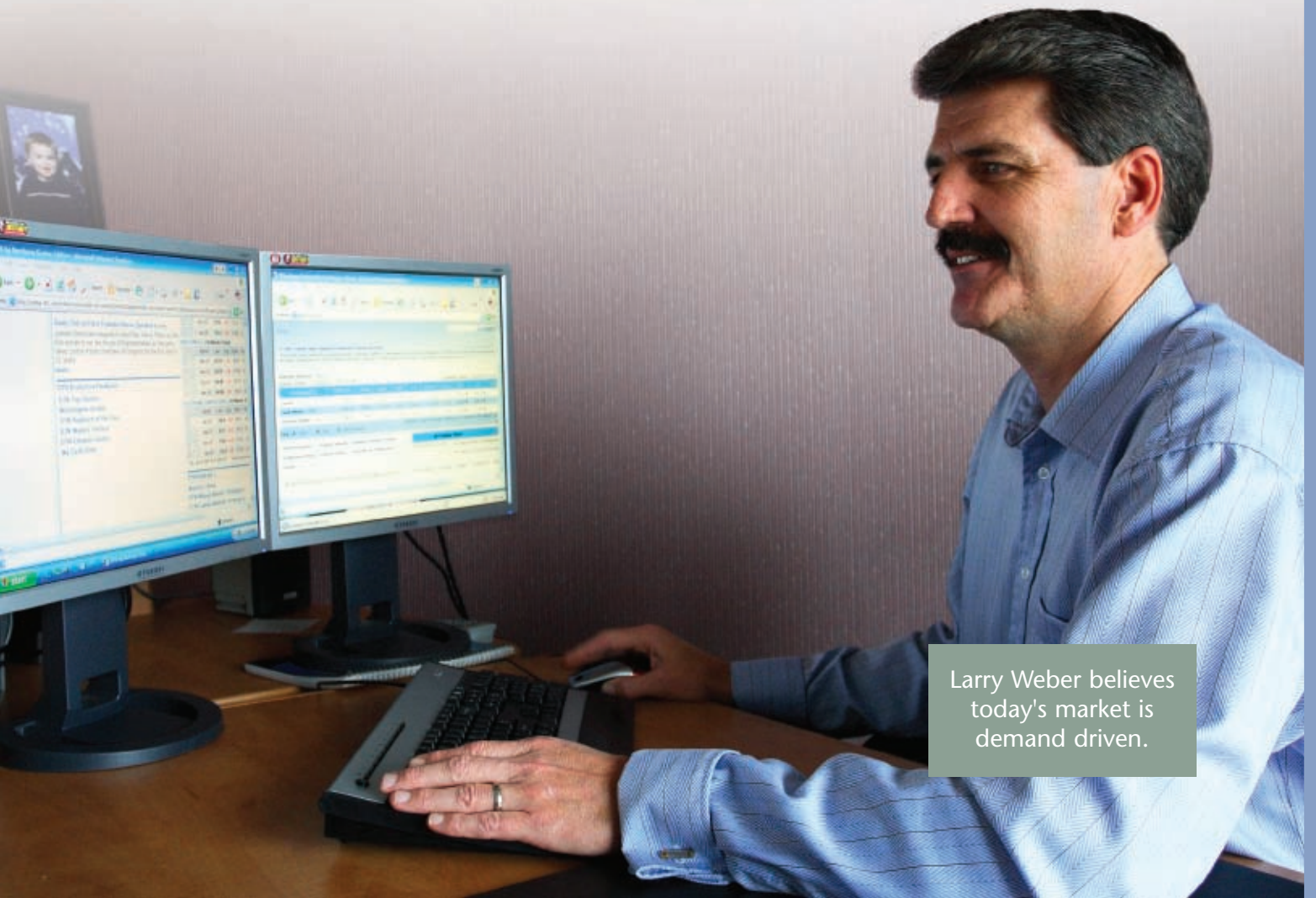
“When you look at all the ethanol plants scheduled to come online and add it to the average feed and industrial consumption of corn, a large U.S. corn crop disappears,” Eadie says. “There is no room for drought or low yield and when one comes along we will see some real fireworks.”

The last time grain stocks dropped this low, the grain industry entered a golden age. The final Canadian Wheat Board payment for red spring wheat went from \$1.41 per bushel in the 1971-72 crop year to \$4.38 in 1973-74. During the same period, Ontario corn went from \$1.52 per bushel to \$3.03. If you adjust these

figures for inflation (325.54 per cent), wheat would sell for \$14.26 and corn for \$9.86 in 2007 dollars.

Will we see these numbers? According to a preliminary price assessment published by Iowa State University extension in November, it all depends on the price of oil. With current U.S. subsidies, \$60-per-barrel oil means ethanol can still be produced profitably from corn worth \$4.05 a bushel. If oil rises back to \$80-per-barrel, then ethanol is profitable with \$5.43 corn. If energy prices stay high, the era of low-cost feed grains may be over for the animal industries.

Are high grain prices going to last? “I guess you could say I’m cautiously optimistic,” Eadie says. ♦



Larry Weber believes today's market is demand driven.

# Beware the information source



BY ALLISON FINNAMORE

**W**e're living in an age of information overload. Handheld computers, text messages, satellite television and radio, blogs, web feeds . . . There's a never-ending list of sources ready to put information in front of us – immediately.

Like any topic, information on agricultural issues spans from reliable to downright wacky – the more controversial the issue, the more opinions. Taken together, the various viewpoints that are typically reported capture the range of opinions and hopefully result in a well-researched and balanced news story.

Information on agricultural issues spans from reliable to downright wacky.

In an ideal world, we'd have time to read many accounts and opinions of an event or issue, but the reality of our busy lives makes that an impossible task. So how do you pick the reliable information?

Consider blogs, the online diaries, or weblogs, that are rapidly growing in popularity. They're free, easily updated either at a computer or via text messaging and the topics are limitless. Anyone with a computer, Internet access and basic computer skills can start and maintain a blog. They are a growing source of information, with many journalists and their newspapers incorporating blogs into their daily realm of reporting the news.

Blogs offer a first-hand, personal experience of news events, rather than the just-the-facts coverage in a report. They satisfy the increasing need for quick information and are typically filled with links to other information sources, where readers can learn more, as they want.

But beware of information that's a single opinion or interpretation. Consider the credibility of the source.

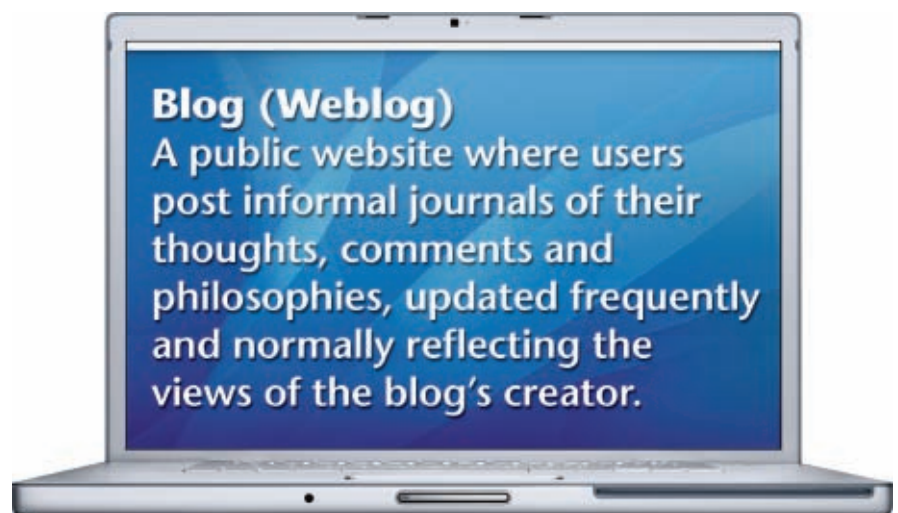
Today's technology gives anyone a forum for their views and the traditional values of balanced reporting don't necessarily apply. Beware of who's a journalist and who isn't.

As agricultural producers, you can be confident knowing your grower associations and organizations provide you with facts applicable to your operation. You likely have trusted sources of technical information and advisors who help keep you informed. Publications focused on agriculture should also be considered a trusted source of information, although each reporter and each publication is still likely to have some particular biases.

Sometimes in the mainstream media and all too often in the world of blogs, the information and viewpoints are not friendly to agriculture. Sometimes the images used are graphic. Sometimes, the information is inaccurate or misrepresented.

In this age of technology where news is only a simple click away on handheld computers and cell phones and instant messages whip around the globe at a lightning pace, it's more important than ever that agriculture delivers messages that are well researched and presented in a straight-forward manner.

All the same communication tools are at our disposal. ❖



Source: E-learning glossary on <http://www.worldwidelearn.com/elearning-essentials>

# Marketing starts with benchmarking



BY HUGH MAYNARD

**M**arketing serves two purposes: it helps you sell more, and it helps you get a better price for what you do sell. Who wouldn't want to "market"? It sounds simple, but there's a lot more to marketing than just wrapping your farm produce in a fancy basket and slapping a logo on the label (if only life were that simple!).

One of the key yet unheralded elements of marketing is information. Creating a brand name for your produce takes all the glory, but the grunt work that results in a successful trade name comes from having a good understanding of all aspects of producing, processing, distributing and selling – even if some of those activities are carried out by others in the value chain. Without the ability to make an informed assessment, marketing decisions will get made for you by someone else.

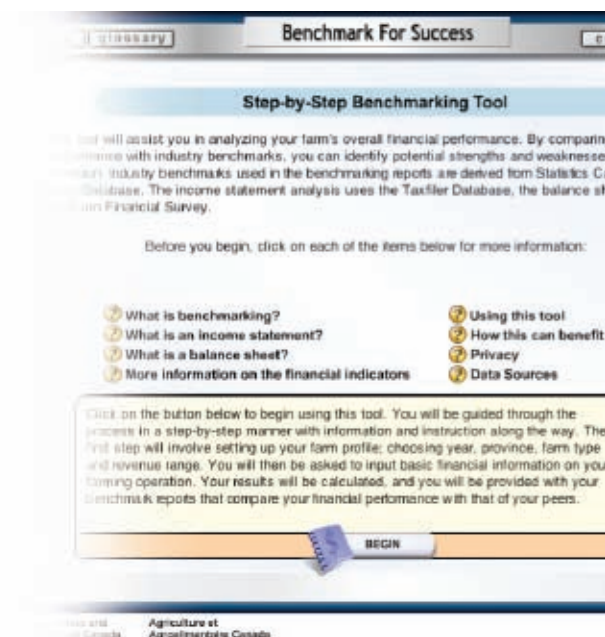
**A useful way to benchmark is through peer comparison.**

Deciding when to market what, and how, can't be done without good intelligence about the market. The farm is the first place to start. Marketing to sell more at a lower price doesn't necessarily pay well, and neither does simply selling at a higher price if you don't have a handle on production costs. Knowing what it takes financially to get a product through the farm gate is the first step to making marketing decisions. Should you produce more, or less, or in a different way – or find something else that will sell at a higher price?

Establishing a cost of production is an important first step to take – most of the information already exists in the data collected for accounting purposes – but what's really important is what you do with that information. A good place to begin is benchmarking – situating yourself in comparison to another point of reference so you can see on a relative basis how your revenues and costs compare.

A useful way to benchmark is through peer comparison so that you can match up to other producers. Quebec's farm management clubs, which are made up of farmers in similar types of production, anonymously pool the cost of production information from all their members so producers can benchmark themselves against the regional and provincial highs and lows. You can also make the first move on your own through the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada Agricultural Policy Framework website ([https://www2.agr.gc.ca/ren/succ\\_e.cfm](https://www2.agr.gc.ca/ren/succ_e.cfm)) where there are online tools that will analyze your farm's figures against those in a regional database.

The process is not just about keeping up with the Joneses. Benchmarking also enables a farm manager to identify trouble spots much quicker, and to measure success when it begins to emerge after making changes in farming or marketing operations. This, in the end, is what marketing is all about – extracting and applying information so you can sell more at a better price, and benchmarking is the place to start. ❖



# Is direct marketing for you?

BY ALLISON FINNAMORE

**D**riven by promoting their own product, the desire to sell straight to the people who eat their food and the wish to increase the income they get for the food they produce, many producers across the country are incorporating direct sales into their agriculture operations.

In a niche market of lamb, or more familiar foods like eggs, poultry and pork, producers are selling to households from the farm gate or for markets. And they're selling wholesale to small grocery stores and to local restaurants and caterers. They're taking advantage of opportunity when it knocks on the barn door.

**Most new business is by word-of-mouth advertising.**

Dana Vader of Prince Edward County, Ont., sells lamb at the farm gate to two high-end restaurants, a meat shop and at the farm market in the summer.

A producer for over 30 years, he started selling to a local restaurant about 15 years ago. Farm gate customers had high praise for his lamb and the chef at a local restaurant heard the buzz. For a product like lamb, chefs of high-end restaurants understand that fresh, and therefore local, tastes the best. When you have a good quality product, Vader says it's important to talk about it, build a customer base and then let your reputation speak for itself. Most of his new business is by word-of-mouth advertising.

Greg Cruickshank, an egg, poultry and hog producer in Waskatenau, Alta., didn't have a reputation to build on when he started his direct sales in 2004. He was a new entrant into agriculture and, after examining various business plans, figured focusing on direct sales was the best opportunity to create a living in agriculture.

"I started selling direct from the farm to make money. If you want to farm, you need to squeeze out as much of a

margin as possible," he says. Today, Cruickshank sells to about 200 homes, two restaurants and a meat packer.

Jumping in with both feet, Cruickshank quickly figured out he had to stand firm behind his products. Customers can be shrewd, he notes, and since they're buying directly from the producer, they have lots of questions.

"I had to be able to answer the questions people had. I also had to learn how to set a price and to be prepared to defend it if people thought it was too much."

Cruickshank says determining product price is an obvious step in direct sales, but producers should realize they're setting a price not only for the value of the product, but the worth of the work and experience of bringing customers closer to food production.

"I have found that you actually need to convince your customers that what you are selling can't be bought at the grocery store," Cruickshank says. "Customers really are half interested in the product and the other half is getting to know the farmer, so you need to be outgoing and provide them with some peace of mind as well as a quality product."

Cruickshank is innovative in finding his direct markets, approaching the local pizza joint and an ethnic restaurant to use his eggs, poultry and pork. The pizza place now uses his eggs in their dough and the ethnic restaurant is committed to his poultry.

Vader and Cruickshank take pride in the food they grow. Sharing that pride and seizing the opportunity to increase their income fosters their ambitions to continue to seek out new markets and put food directly onto the plates of consumers. ❖

## *Direct marketing tips*

from Charlie Touchette, executive director of the North American Farmers' Direct Marketing Association and Greg Cruickshank, Alberta producer.

1. Love what you do. If you don't like working with people, stay out of direct marketing.
2. Be organized and set priorities to ensure your operation runs smoothly.
3. Customers don't care as much about a per-pound price as they do about the total price. Set a price point for yourself that you think people are willing to pay.
4. Don't be afraid to sell your product. Telling people about it is the only way to get customers.
5. Some people will pay what you want to make. Others are more interested in a bargain. Target the former.
6. Be presentable. The product doesn't always sell itself. You need to look and be trustworthy and sincere.
7. Be open-minded and willing to grow with opportunities. You can't be locked into one product.
8. Network with other direct marketers. They are your friends, not your competition. It will pay off.





# Even superheroes have sidekicks

Work together to make your farm safe for everyone

It's called superhero complex, and it makes some farmers try to do everything themselves. Instead, ask for help when you need it. Check up on employees every two hours. Let people know where you'll be working and when you plan on coming back. To be a real superhero, manage the safety risk in your operation.



Farm Credit Canada

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# Protecting your moving parts



BY PETER VAN DONGEN

Canadian Agricultural Safety Week is March 14-20, 2007. This year's theme, "Protect your moving parts!" focuses on pinch points, entanglements and the importance of guarding. It brings back one of my most memorable farm safety lessons.

"The incident" occurred in my mid-teens when I was feeding silage on our dairy farm. It took three conveyors to transport the silage from our old tower silo to the feed bunk, and you had to really watch the first conveyor to make sure it didn't plug up when the silage came down the chute. It was a chilly day, so I had my hands pulled up into the sleeves of my jacket to keep them warm.

**A few extra minutes is a small price to pay.**

As I watched the silage tumble onto the conveyor, I felt the need to stretch out my arms. That's when "it" happened. As I reached back, I felt a sudden jolt. It was as if someone had grabbed my arm and tried to yank it out of my shoulder socket. Then, just as quickly as it began, my arm was released. The whole experience lasted just a fraction of a second.

In shock, I turned around slowly and the reality of what had just occurred began to sink in. Behind me was the belt and pulley that drove the conveyor – unguarded. When I reached back to stretch, my sleeve caught between the belt and the pulley and was whipped around for a full revolution before, fortunately, being released.

Looking back now, I'm convinced that the only thing that saved me from a much worse fate was the fact that my hands were tucked into my sleeves. Had I reached back with my hand exposed, I could have easily lost my fingers, arm or worse. (In fact, I still could have.) More importantly, I believe two things could have prevented this incident from occurring: awareness and prevention.

First, had I been more aware of my surroundings, I would have known not to stretch my arms behind me as I did.

You need to be aware of the risks around you in order to avoid them. Fortunately, it's easy to do. Take a few seconds when you start a new task to scan the work area to identify any safety risks. You could even develop a system to identify the safety risks on your farm. It can be as simple as marking risks with a big X in red tape.

Second, despite my momentary lapse in awareness, my sleeve would not have been caught had the belt and pulley been properly guarded. Granted, it takes a few extra minutes to take off and reinstall a guard if something goes wrong. However, after this experience, I would argue that a few extra minutes is a small price to pay.

I was lucky. But Lady Luck is a fickle mistress and I certainly wouldn't bet the farm on her. Far better to protect your moving parts by practising the habits of awareness and proper guarding.

For more information about Canadian Agricultural Safety Week, go to: [www.cfa-fca.ca/pages/](http://www.cfa-fca.ca/pages/) and click on Programs and Projects. ❖



# A boost for fibre farming



BY OWEN ROBERTS

**T**he Winnipeg-based Composites Innovation Centre's interests in flax and hemp go beyond the realm of health. While the rest of the world focuses on the seed, the Centre's collective eyes are fixed on the stalk.

The not-for-profit CIC supports and stimulates economic growth through innovative research, development and application of composite materials and technologies for manufacturing industries.

Whatever can be made of fibreglass can be made from bio-fibre.

It specializes in aerospace, ground transportation and civil infrastructure such as bridges.

Natural fibres, as part of a matrix, produce lighter-weight and lower-cost composite parts. The CIC's

executive director, Sean McKay, anticipates natural fibre reinforcements (for interior bus panels and storage compartments, for example) can be competitive, compared to current fibreglass reinforcements.

Almost two years ago, the Centre began to focus on natural fibres for this higher-end market. Feedback was solicited throughout the value chain from an expert group of 45 stakeholders, including producers and potential end users like those in the motor coach industry.

"We wanted to determine gaps in the sector that had kept bio-fibres from being developed into the kind of products our prospective clients need," McKay says.

A big reason for the gap was the investment community's lack of confidence in natural fibres. It's unconvinced that natural fibres are attractive, saleable commodities.

That's where the CIC comes in. With \$750,000 in support from the federal government, the Province of Manitoba and Western Diversification Fund Canada, it's embarking on a bio-fibres research and development program that will take hemp and flax fibre to a new level.

Within 18 months, the Centre will create and test two new forms of fibre mat for interior bus panels made from Canadian-grown hemp and flax bio-fibres. As well, two

decortication pilot facilities will be built to develop better ways to efficiently and effectively extract fibre from the stalk.

McKay believes that whatever is made of fibreglass can be made from bio-fibre instead, and flax and hemp are central to his vision. Canada is ripe with flax – more than one million acres of it, grown mainly in western Canada – and hemp, which stands at about 25,000 acres, is just waiting for a major market to take off.

Further east, more activities in the ground transportation sphere are percolating at the Ontario AgriCentre in Guelph. There, a new initiative called BioAuto is taking shape. It's specifically designed to help farmers find new markets in Ontario's auto industry. The Ontario BioAuto Council membership includes auto assembly and manufacturing companies, as well as natural resources representatives from agriculture and forestry.

Basically, the members will focus on how biological feedstock such as soybeans and wood can be turned into a variety of car parts. BioAuto wants to capitalize on existing research strengths in the area. For example, University of Guelph plant agriculture researchers have teamed up with chemical engineers at the University of Waterloo to determine the Ontario crop fibre genotype that is best suited to bio-composite applications.

West or east, crops are being viewed with an eye to fibre applications. Provided the economics are there, producers will be among the beneficiaries. ❖



## Field Manager PRO designed for producers

Producers can now track their crop production and field information with Field Manager PRO, a new software program launched by the AgExpert division of FCC.

Field Manager PRO is designed specifically for Canadian farmers to plan, record and track all field and crop information. The system covers all crop sectors across Canada, and allows tracking of multiple farms on both a desktop computer and either Microsoft Windows Mobile® or Pocket PC devices.

Using Microsoft  
Windows  
Mobile® or  
Pocket PC  
devices brings  
the farm to your  
fingertips.

“The changing marketplace needs technology that keeps them as efficient and profitable as possible, so that’s why we’re excited to announce the launch of Field Manager PRO,” says Rob Schmeichel, AgExpert Director. “With this tool, producers can plan and analyze cropping scenarios, as well as manage inputs, costs and field activities. Using Microsoft Windows Mobile® or Pocket PC devices brings the farm to your fingertips.”

The system includes desktop and mobile components. Field Manager PRO Desktop runs on a personal computer for record keeping, comparing crop plans and running crop

projections. Field Manager PRO Mobile runs on a Windows-OS handheld for reviewing and entering information anywhere, including out in the field.

“Desktop and Mobile components work together to create a powerful system to permanently track all your records. You never have to worry about losing that little black notebook that contained your vital information.”

Producers can forecast crop plans to project income and expenses before seeding begins. The system is capable of running any crop scenario for every region, and can establish the break-even level for various fields and crops, aiding producers with their production choices.

The system lets producers create their own production and analysis reports such as profit by field or farm, harvest and yield by field or farm, crop rotation, crop input use, soil tests, sales/inventory and crop insurance.

“Information is synchronized and transferred from one or more handhelds to a personal computer with one touch,” Schmeichel says. “Then reports can be printed from that information for a specific field, crop or entire farm.”

Producers or consultants managing more than one operation can take advantage of Field Manager PRO’s ability to have multiple data files with the software on one handheld and desktop, and to look back at historical crop and field information.

Field Manager PRO is the latest offering from FCC, which also produces AgExpert Analyst farm accounting software.

Both Field Manager PRO and AgExpert Analyst include toll-free access to English and French software support specialists who understand Canadian agriculture.

More information about AgExpert products and services is available at [www.AgExpert.ca](http://www.AgExpert.ca). ❖



# Pull out all the stops with the Advancer Loan

## Introducing the Advancer Loan from FCC.

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