

May/June 2007

# Agrisuccess

JOURNAL

## Farming from afar

With new technology, it's easier  
than ever to know what's happening  
inside your barns and bins

The technology carrot  
Cashing in on their best

Can you hear me now?

Rust never sleeps



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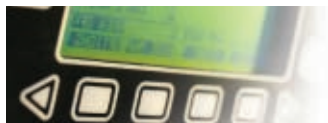
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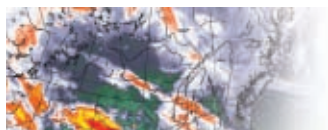
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JOURNAL

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Ronald and Jill Layden raise  
cattle east of Innisfail, Alta.



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Canada

# Letter from the editors



FROM KEVIN HURSH AND ALLISON FINNAMORE

“**E**verything increases in price except farm commodities” is a sentiment you’ll regularly hear on coffee row. While farm commodity prices are often disappointing, one farm input cost remains relatively inexpensive – technology.

Equipment with new technology can carry a hefty price tag, as evidenced by new combines that are in the half-million-dollar range, but technology itself is advancing rapidly without a corresponding increase in cost.

Just look at what a desktop computer can do as compared to five or 10 years ago. Or marvel at how big-screen televisions have become affordable for more consumers. Remember when a long distance phone call was cost-prohibitive?

While technology can seem overwhelming, there have also been major strides in making new gadgets user-friendly.

You need to make decisions about what technology fits your operation. Chances are, you’re using technology today that seemed like science fiction just a few short years ago. And chances are you’ll use even more amazing technology in the years to come.

As you may have guessed, technology is the theme of this edition of the Journal. We’re taking this occasion to launch a regular offering in Your Money. Each edition will feature a new technology that costs less than \$500. This time, the featured technology is pocket-sized wind meters.

We enjoy your comments and story ideas. You can e-mail us through [info@AgriSuccess.ca](mailto:info@AgriSuccess.ca), or call 1-888-332-3301.

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.

## AgriSuccess JOURNAL

### This month's contributors

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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.

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Susanne has a diploma in print and agricultural journalism. She has worked for the last 16 years as a journalist and editor for farm business and rural community publications in Ontario and Quebec.

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Lorraine is a freelance journalist who lives in High River, Alta. She grew up on a large grain farm at nearby Vulcan and has written for a number of agriculture-related publications.

**Tom Button**  
For over 20 years, Tom has been a journalist and public affairs specialist dedicated to communicating about Canadian agriculture. His company, Twin Banks Communications, operates from south of Ridgetown, Ont.

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.*

# Potato production, not just acres

BY ALLISON FINNAMORE

**P**otato producer groups across North America are trying to find out exactly how many potatoes are grown on the continent.

The United Potato Growers of Canada and the United Potato Growers of America are working to curtail production in an attempt to increase prices for table and seed stock potatoes. Accurate figures on potato stocks, say the groups, would be used for more precise marketing.

Bruce Huffaker of the North American Potato Marketing News says accurate statistics on Canadian potato production are hard to find. That's because acreage, instead of production, is recorded.

"The view is blurry because you are not getting good information about your potato stock," says Huffaker, adding UPGC is working with Statistics Canada to encourage a change of the recording method. In the meantime, provincial groups are beginning to collect production figures.

## Pocket-sized wind meters

BY TOM BUTTON

**S**tarting under \$150, a new generation of calculator-sized wind meters gives instant, detailed readouts of in-field weather conditions that can help producers make critical spray and cropping decisions.

Accurate wind speed reports let growers know exactly when to stop spraying because of potential drift. In-field temperature readouts also help producers minimize crop injury risks. Reports on relative humidity and dewpoint can help determine the application window, to maximize the effectiveness of crop protection investment or to keep track of disease potential.

The battery-powered units come with memory functions too, making it simple to maintain precise records. Producers who have started using the hand-held meters recommend shopping for a model with an easy-to-read display, replaceable wind wheel, and a choice of imperial and metric scales.

To find distributors in your region, check out manufacturers' websites, including [www.KestrelMeters.com](http://www.KestrelMeters.com), [www.SpeedTech.com](http://www.SpeedTech.com) and [www.GreenLeafTech.com](http://www.GreenLeafTech.com).

# Free market information on the Internet

BY D. LARRAINE ANDREWS

**T**he Internet offers plenty of market information for a fee. But there are many good sites with access to useful information at no cost. Here are a few suggestions:

### [www.AgricultureSearch.com](http://www.AgricultureSearch.com)

Buy, sell and trade ag equipment, trucks, trailers, passenger vehicles; access to dealers across Canada and North America

### [www.cama.org](http://www.cama.org)

Canadian Agri-Marketing Association provides information for provincial chapters including Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario and Saskatchewan to promote excellence in marketing, ag products, services and programs

### [www.Farms.com](http://www.Farms.com)

Comprehensive site with access to commentary and daily market information for swine, crops and cattle

### [www.GeorgeMorris.org](http://www.GeorgeMorris.org)

Independent "think tank" provides market analysis and forecasting, strategic planning; paid membership gives access to detailed information but many reports and papers available for free online

### [www.OrganicAgCentre.ca](http://www.OrganicAgCentre.ca)

Market information, research papers and much more for organic farmers in B.C., the Prairies, Ontario, Quebec and Atlantic, including a French component

# The technology carrot



BY KEVIN HURSH

Producers have been lining up for environmental farm planning workshops. Like society in general, environmental awareness has blossomed among producers. But the success of the Farm Stewardship Program has come largely from the cost-sharing incentives available to those who have completed the process and who have a certified action plan.

The process encourages participants to think more deeply about environmental issues.

Environmental farm plans have been part of Ontario agriculture much longer than in many other areas of the country. In my home province of Saskatchewan, workshops really just caught on this past winter.

I enrolled in the process and like many others, my goal was not completely altruistic. I had my eye on a GPS guidance system and maybe even an auto-steer system for my tractor. With an endorsed environmental farm plan, I can get matching funds of up to 30 per cent. Paying attention to the environment will help me pay for some new technology.

Other producers attending the workshops had different plans. Some wanted to upgrade fuel storage. Some were considering new manure-handling systems. Others wanted assistance to decommission old water wells.

While some projects like GPS guidance are eligible for 30 per cent funding, others are at 50 per cent. There's a limit to how much matching money a producer can receive in any one category, with the overall limit at \$50,000 per producer.

If it's something you want to do or have to do anyway, the matching funds are attractive. Good thing, otherwise I might not have completed the process.

It's hard to design a workbook that applies to all situations on the farm. I found myself wavering over where to place the checkmarks that best apply to my operation and wondering why one practice was considered better for the environment than something else.

I don't have livestock and I don't live on the farmstead, so my homework between workshops would have been far simpler than what many producers experienced.

Each producer's plan is a confidential self-assessment. A peer group sees only the anonymous plan for dealing with environmental risks. What's more, the funding a producer applies for doesn't have to relate to the beneficial management practices identified in the plan, so producers aren't tempted to slant their plan to the funding they desire. On the other hand, some may wonder whether public funding should be available to help me pay for my GPS guidance system.

GPS will help reduce fertilizer and pesticide overlap, but that may not have been the most pressing environmental need in my operation.

The process certainly encourages participants to think more deeply about environmental issues. However, without the incentive package, participation would be limited. The current program ends on March 31, 2008.

It's widely expected that the nation's agriculture policy going forward will pay even more attention to the environment. Perhaps future programs will build on the approach and the success of the environmental farm planning process. After all, technology has proven to be a great carrot for encouraging environmental action. ❖

## National Farm Stewardship Program

Producers who have a completed and reviewed environmental farm plan are eligible to apply for financial assistance through the National Farm Stewardship Program to implement beneficial management practices.

The program is provincially delivered. Appropriate contacts and more information can be obtained from [www.agr.gc.ca](http://www.agr.gc.ca). Look under Agriculture Policy Framework.



# Cashing in on their best

BY HUGH MAYNARD AND SUSANNE J. BROWN

They focus their breeding on longevity rather than production.

The term “cash cow” is not just an expression for the fifth-generation owners of a Holstein farm in Brownsburg-Chatham in western Quebec. It’s been part of their farm development plan for over twenty years.

In their mid-thirties, Michel Guay and Linda Latulipe operate Lolisee Farm, well known for the high-quality Holsteins they have consistently produced since 1993. In that period, they have earned 11 All Canadian nominations, two Reserve All Canadian cows, 33 Exhibitor banners, 11 Breeder banners, 27 Grand Champion cows, 33 Reserve Grand Champion cows, and 55 Excellent cows (25 of which carry the Lolisee prefix).

Lolisee Farm didn’t gain its great reputation based on always having purebreds. “My father had more interest in fieldwork and machinery than cattle,” Guay says, adding that in 1983 – at the age of 13 – he took over the management of the family’s mostly grade cattle when his older sister left home to get married.

“I was deciding everything – from which cows to breed to what sires, to what cows got sent for beef, sold or bought,” Guay says. By the age of 16, he stopped buying cattle at nearby sales and started driving to different herds outside the local area to purchase higher-quality cattle as the linchpin in the farm’s development.

Long before Guay obtained a diploma in agriculture from Alfred College in eastern Ontario, his parents instilled in him the need to keep debt at a manageable level.

They had transferred the farm to him in 1997, through a mixture of family financing and loans. Latulipe, who has a degree in nutritional science from McGill University, became part of farm and family life at the same time. “At that time,” she explains “we still found ourselves owning a farm that required a great deal of investment.”

This is where the cash cows came in to the equation. They weren’t without a bank of options considering they already had an “outstanding herd of elite cows Michel had built up over the years,” Latulipe says.

The herd is managed to ensure there is always a surplus of purebred cattle. They focus their breeding on longevity rather than production, which means they can sell many of their younger cattle on a regular basis and don’t need to push their older cows to give too much milk.

Latulipe, who grew up on a purebred Holstein farm in St-Anicet in southwestern Quebec, says this approach has allowed them to build gradually. They’ve invested in 12 kilograms of additional quota and substantial renovations to the dairy barn, with 75 per cent of the construction costs financed by selling some of their younger purebred cattle.

Given the substantial costs that young dairy farmers face to become established, leveraging important value out of the farm’s best asset – top-notch dairy cows – is a strategy that’s hard not to cash in on. ❖



Linda Latulipe and Michel Guay operate la Ferme Lolisee



# An image backed by regulations



BY ALLISON FINNAMORE

Canada's organic food industry is facing every businessperson's dream: exploding popularity creating a demand too great to be filled. And, with the recent implementation of federal laws regulating the industry, new standards are in place to ensure quality and to back up labelling claims on organic foods.

The Organic Products Regulations came into effect in December 2006. The regulations prevent deceptive and

Canada is the  
40th country to  
implement organic  
regulations.

misleading use of the organic claim. Only products grown and processed in compliance with the Canadian organic standard will be authorized to carry the newly introduced Canada Organic label. Processed organic foods must contain at least 95 per cent organic ingredients to qualify for certification. The regulations will be phased in over the next two years, after which all organic products for interprovincial and international trade must be labelled as Canada Organic.

Laura Telford is executive director of Canadian Organic Growers. She says the regulations bring authenticity to organic foods and will help build consumer confidence.

"We wanted to add government legitimacy so consumers understand organics," she says.

Not that consumers need much encouragement. Telford says organic production increases an average of four per cent a year, while the demand increases 20 per cent. Canada's organic food market is valued at about \$1 billion. The retail industry has certainly taken notice and is anxious to capture some of those consumer dollars.

"There's a huge mismatch between supply and demand," Telford says. "The gap is filled in with imports." In fact, she adds, about 80 per cent of the organic food Canadian consumers buy is imported.

At the same time the domestic organic producers sought standardization, export markets were looking for the same. Canada is the 40th country to implement organic regulations, prompted by the European Union who set December 2006 as the deadline for standardization. If we had missed the deadline, the EU claims trade would have ended.

Telford says an increasing number of producers are switching to organic production and new entrants are also making their way into the sector – all seeking to capture some of the growing demand for organic foods.

It's exciting to hear about expansion and growth in any agriculture sector, but the organic industry faces some challenges. Organic growers believe in sustainable agriculture based on long-term ecologically and environmentally sound practices. Having the majority of the domestic market serviced by imports that have travelled hundreds if not thousands of kilometres does not fit with the philosophy or the image. Big box retailers marketing organic food is also a concern to some growers.

Yet the more organic foods are in stores, the more consumer awareness will increase. That should be a good thing, but the industry is going to have to find the balance between philosophies and the bottom line.

## Want to learn more about organics?

Here are a few places to start:

The Government of Canada's Organic Products Regulations are available online. Go to <http://canadagazette.gc.ca/partII/2006/20061221-x6/html/extra-e.html> to read them.

For education and networking, visit the Canadian Organic Growers website at <http://www.cog.ca/> or phone them at 1-888-375-7383.

The Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada has information about the science and practice of organics, as well as market information. Visit their website at [http://www.organiccentre.ca/index\\_e.asp](http://www.organiccentre.ca/index_e.asp) or phone them at 1-902-893-7256. ❖

# Farming

## *from afar*

BY ALLISON FINNAMORE

**Y**ou pour a lot of time and energy into the farm, not to mention the financial investment. Yet it's impossible to keep watch over your crop or livestock all day, every day. Throughout the years, producers have come up with dozens of ways to monitor their livestock and crop inventory. Today, some use cutting edge, innovative technology. Others use more traditional monitoring methods, often with modernizing updates.

Throughout the years, producers have come up with dozens of ways to monitor their livestock and crop inventory.

Derek Janzen of Bordercreek Farms in B.C.'s Fraser Valley raises about 100,000 broiler chickens and 21,000 commercial layer hens. Each of his barns is electronically monitored and connected to the computer in his office. Barn temperature, humidity, feed consumption, water consumption, fan speeds, heating and cooling are all tracked. If temperatures rise too high or dip too low, the system's alarms sound.

And, Janzen says, not only is the climate monitored, but it's also controlled by the computer system. Taking into account outside conditions and the age of the birds, the computer system adjusts the climate accordingly.

"It provides optimal conditions for the birds," he says.

Janzen has taken monitoring to the next level, too, and can now oversee what's going on inside the barn without being tied to his home office. A new software program sends e-mail updates on conditions in the barns.

"Several times a day, information is sent out. With my BlackBerry, I'm able to see what's going on," he says.

High-tech has also made its way to many livestock barns across the country. Chris Sobchuk of Allen Leigh Enterprise sells wireless video monitoring systems, called CowCam,

to livestock producers. Used mainly to keep a watchful eye on the barns during calving, the image and audio are wirelessly transmitted to the producer's television in the house, saving producers frequent trips to the birthing stalls.

With systems like the CowCam, a closed-circuit camera is mounted to the wall of the pen with a cable linked to the transmitter box located in a weather-proof casing on the outside of the barn. With 2.4 gigahertz transmission frequency similar to many cordless phones, information is transmitted wirelessly to the producer's television. Installation inside is simple, Sobchuk says, and involves not much more than plugging in the connectors to the receiver unit and turning on the TV.

Sobchuk says the system is less intrusive to the cow since she usually stands up and moves around when disturbed during labour. Monitoring the birth from afar reduces stress, he says, and after birth the producer can maintain the watch, ensuring the animal is nursing, since the audio picks up the sucking sounds.

Jill Layden raises cattle east of Innisfail, Alta. She purchased a CowCam from Sobchuk a few years ago and agrees her animals are calmer during birth. With two cameras in the calving barn, Layden says the systems are invaluable.

"It takes a lot of the stress off us and the cow," she says. "Before, we would go out and check every couple of hours. Now, the animals don't get as upset and hyper." The monitoring has also helped Layden save a calf. She was watching the calf's birth when she saw it emerge with the embryonic sack



still over its head. Making a dash for the barn, Layden was able to safely remove the sack.

Bert Sutherland of Skyway Grain Systems Inc. has helped take high-tech monitoring to grain bins.

He sells Opi brand products, including monitoring systems. With this product, a cable hangs down into the centre of the bin. A temperature sensor is located every four feet along the cable, continuously recording grain

temperature. If spoilage begins, the temperature of the surrounding grain rises and is detected by the sensor. An alert notifies the producer to take action.

Sutherland says that when grain bin monitors first came on the market about 20 years ago, they were analogue transmitters, measuring the entire bin temperature at the same time and keeping no record. Now, with digital monitoring, temperatures from individual probes are monitored and information is easily reviewed.



Jill and Ronald Layden monitor their cattle through their television set.



As well, Sutherland adds, multiple bins can be monitored and various temperatures from each recorded. Some customers opt to have a direct link to their fan systems, so temperature variations can trigger the fans.

Monitoring systems may sound expensive but in many cases there's something to meet every budget, and six bins could be equipped with external monitoring for under \$2,500. Sutherland sees the expenditure as insurance.

"It doesn't take very much to lose \$5,000 worth of grain," he says, especially with niche markets.

Jeff Wilson produces fruits and vegetables about 80 kilometres northwest of Toronto. His air-to-air and humidity-controlled computerized storage systems are in place for his cabbage and potato crops and he views both as maintenance, not enhancement, of a quality product.

"The whole art is to put good cabbage in storage and it comes out just as good," he says. "In February, we should be packing cabbage that's pretty close to being at the quality level that it was in October." It's also a time-

management issue. Cabbage deteriorated in storage due to poor environmental controls means more trimming before shipping.

Installation of storage-monitoring systems meant a shift in Wilson's traditional thinking. Vegetable markets, like any other market, demand top quality product year-round, and to deliver means investing in technology.

"Before, it was hit or miss. We would put the cabbage in storage and hope for the best. If you made a profit, great. If you didn't, well, try again next year," Wilson says. Now, technology's a management tool he counts on.

Whether keeping track of products in storage or monitoring critical parts of the production cycle like calving, there are systems available to help. What's more, the technology is becoming more affordable and reliable. Increasingly, the cost/benefit analysis says the investment is worthwhile. ❖





# Technology, but not for technology's sake



BY HUGH MAYNARD

Farming has benefited enormously from technology – from hydraulics and the three-point hitch all the way through to the emergence of GPS and some very, very precise farming. Yet technology is just a means to an end – more efficiency, more productivity, more time off (dream on, eh?) – and not just an end in itself. This is something that tends to be forgotten in the rush to keep up with the Joneses.

Given the relative expense of new technologies, farmers need to choose wisely before adding equipment or upgrading. The first point of consideration is whether

Farmers need to choose wisely before adding equipment or upgrading.

the technology brings some added value to the management and operation of the farm.

Farmers have become very computerized in recent years, and especially so as an integral part of their machinery

and equipment. Automatic take-offs in dairy barns and computerized monitoring systems in tractor cabs have become commonplace alongside the number-crunching power of the desktop computer. Yet regardless of all the “bells and whistles” that come with every new addition of technology, there is a value-for-money analysis that needs to be carried out: does it do more, does it do it better, and does it do it for less?

The second consideration is evaluating unfamiliar technology before buying. This is more than just kicking the tires on the lot. There are lots of ways technology can help, but there's no one piece of technology that will meet all your needs. Even if the equipment is high quality and dependable, will it give you the results you anticipate for your operation, especially when it comes to doing more with less?

The best way to become better informed – which producers are very good at – is to talk to another user first. Demo sites, field days and installations at neighbouring farms are good points for assessment.

Other sources of information are the venerable old mail-order catalogues for small pieces of equipment and parts. Sometimes they're just another piece of junk mail; other times they offer the opportunity for brand and price comparisons along with technical specs.

And the Internet is now a vast repository of technology information, for old and new, and an easy way to purchase if you're comfortable with online credit card use. Not only can you find replacements for those long-lost user manuals for older equipment, but eBay, as an example, has an amazing range of techie things for sale. Just don't be too amazed as you revel in the thrill of the online auction!

Last but not least, avoid the beta versions or prototypes – even on sale – unless you're really familiar with the technology. Companies will often recruit testers to help get all the kinks out of a new system, which is a good thing given that not all angles can be realistically covered in the lab. Leave the prototypes to the keeners who've got time on their hands and whose hobby is technology for technology's sake. ❖



# Weathering *the weather*

BY ALLISON FINNAMORE

**M**ild temperatures, extreme snowfall, minimum snow coverage, heavy rains, drought, wind speed – one topic that’s always of interest to Canadian producers is the weather.

Producers are seeking their own ways of measuring, monitoring and forecasting the impact of weather.

Canadians have experienced some extreme weather conditions over the last few years, much of which could not be anticipated. All of these conditions impact the farm, affecting everything from seed germination and herd health to spray schedules and yield.

As Bruce Burnett, director of weather and crop surveillance at the Canadian Wheat Board puts it, weather can be predictably unpredictable.

“Weather is the one variable farmers have no control over, no matter what crop they’re growing,” Burnett says.

In an attempt to accurately monitor weather conditions and to have specific weather information, an increasing number of producers are seeking their own ways of measuring, monitoring and forecasting the impact of weather on their own fields. They’re using technology to gather site-specific information to make management decisions. Some producers are using data from nearby Environment Canada weather stations, while others are opting to install technology on their own farms. Still others are using value-added services based on regional weather models.

Michael Giles is the business development manager with Growth Stage Consulting, a Calgary-based company that develops weather models for agriculture producers.

He explains that by purchasing weather data from sources like Environment Canada and AccuWeather, Growth Stage creates a model to forecast weed and insect emergence, crop development and disease outbreaks.

“We can predict two weeks in advance when an outbreak is going to occur or when it will be time to harvest,” Giles says.

Updates are e-mailed weekly, arming producers with information to plan when to scout, spray or start harvesting.

“It helps with better decision management. Every farmer is busy – some are working off-farm or if I’ve got 5,000 acres, it’s hard to get to all my acres in a timely manner,” Giles says.

The Canadian Wheat Board ran a series of day-long training sessions earlier this spring, to teach producers how to use their own weather stations, manage information and make it useful to their farm operations. Burnett says having site-specific information is a key management tool. He also notes the importance of weather monitoring in environmental farm plans. All aspects of weather data play a role, such as rainfall intensities to monitor soil erosion losses.

“It makes common sense to have something tailored to your local conditions,” Burnett says.

Site-specific weather information is essential for local management, but the CWB also takes a macro look at weather around the globe, especially in regions where grain is a major commodity. A group of CWB experts collect weather data through remote sensing and satellite imaging to monitor crop conditions around the world. It’s all part of staying informed.

“We are in international markets, so monitoring conditions throughout the globe is one of the things you can do to help in terms of marketing grains internationally. It’s one of these pieces of constant interest and will lead to more or less imports or competition, for example,” Burnett says.

Whether it’s personal weather data collection with your own weather station, forecast models from a service provider or an international peek at growing conditions on the other side of the world, technology

is bringing effective management tools close to home and creating an atmosphere that’s helping producers manage the unmanageable.

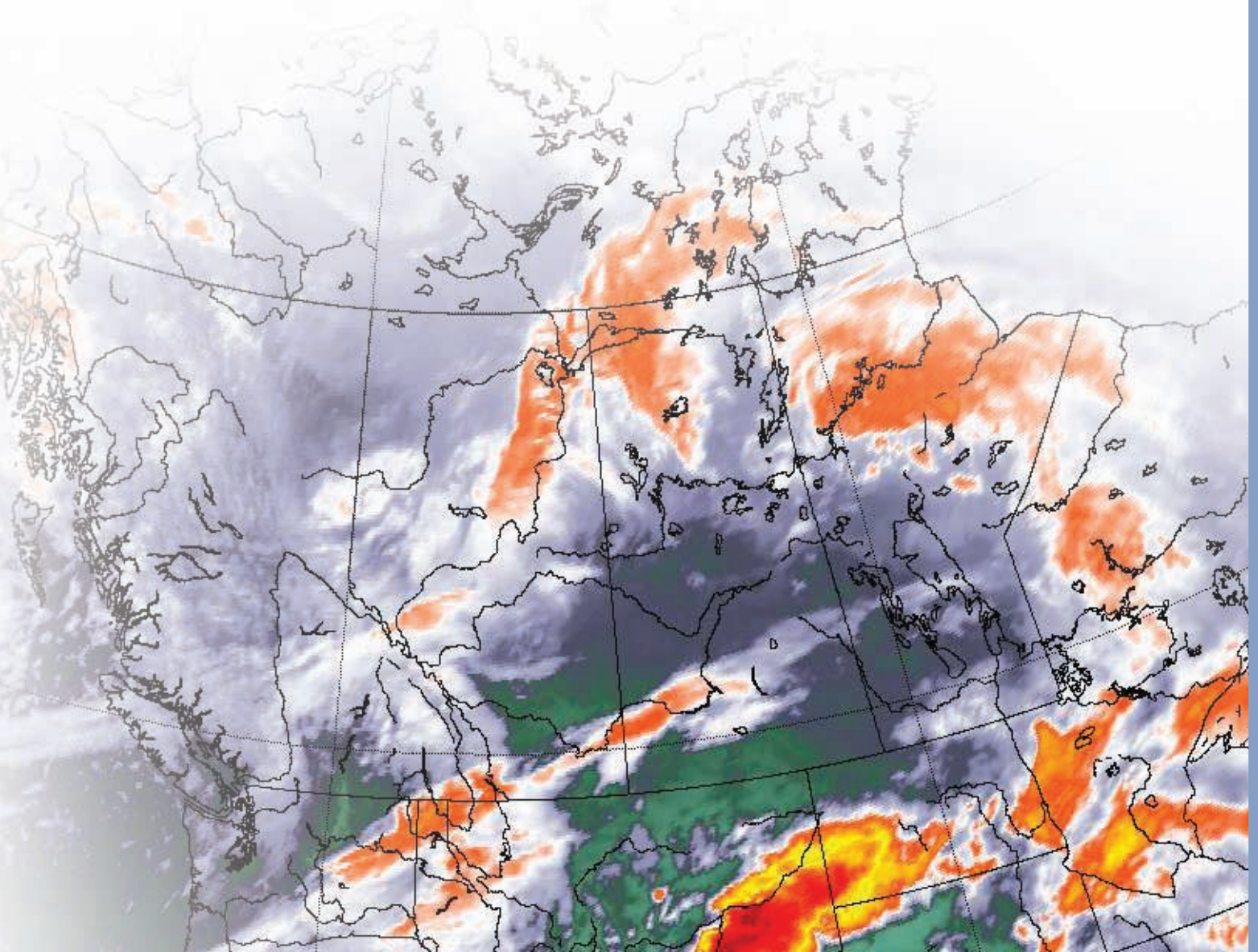
Find out more from the sources mentioned here at their websites:

Canadian Wheat Board: [www.cwb.ca](http://www.cwb.ca)


Environment Canada: [www.weatheroffice.ec.gc.ca](http://www.weatheroffice.ec.gc.ca)

Growth Stage Consulting: [www.growthstage.com](http://www.growthstage.com)

Accuweather: [www.accuweather.com](http://www.accuweather.com) ❖







**“It’s a step towards full-time farming for the kids. For us, it’s a step towards retirement.”**

– The Berkans

### **Fast forward your future**

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# Can you hear me now?



BY PETER VAN DONGEN

**C**an you hear me now? You've probably heard this little phrase, or said it yourself, countless times while trying to connect with someone on a cell phone. But imagine the frustration if people started saying it to you in the context of everyday conversation.

Studies have shown that producers suffer greater hearing loss than people of comparable age in other occupations.

**Simply put, the farm can be a noisy place.**

For instance, a recent study of over 1,400 producers in Saskatchewan found that nearly 40 per cent had already suffered hearing loss and an additional 30 per cent were showing early signs of loss. Simply put, the farm can be a noisy place.

Part of the challenge in dealing with hearing loss is the nature of the risk. Unlike the immediate impact of being crushed or entangled in a piece of equipment, hearing loss tends to occur gradually, usually over a number of years, so we may not even realize it's happening. It can occur without ever feeling any pain.

That's why it's so important to be aware of the potentially damaging sources of noise on your farm. Sheila James is a farm safety consultant for the Ontario Farm Safety Association. She uses a device called a dosimeter to help farmers pinpoint high-risk activities.

"I'll go around to different pieces of equipment and measure how loud they are," she says. "According to the standards here in Ontario, anything over 85 decibels is loud enough that you need to be wearing hearing protection."

The other thing to consider is the duration of time that you or your employee is exposed to the noise. In short, the louder the noise, the less time you can be exposed to it before damage starts to occur. This means that a barn full of squealing pigs at feeding time, which can measure upwards of 120 decibels, can do as much damage to your hearing in five minutes as operating a tractor with an insulated cab (about 85 decibels) for eight hours.

By comparison, normal conversation measures around 65 decibels. As a good rule of thumb, any machinery or activities that require you to raise your voice to communicate with a person standing an arm's length away is a hazard. Other warning signs include noise that hurts your ears or leaves your ears ringing for several hours after exposure.

So what can you do to protect yourself and your employees? Experts suggest that the best solution is to reduce the noise level at its source. Some simple steps include making sure equipment is in good repair and installing shields or enclosures (like a tractor cab) to help block out the noise.

Of course, it's not always possible to eliminate or reduce the noise, so you may need to wear or provide your employees with hearing protection such as ear plugs or ear muffs. When fitted properly, these devices significantly reduce the volume of sound entering your ear while still allowing you to hear conversation or the sounds of your machinery.

Remember, although gradual, noise-induced hearing loss is permanent – it cannot be cured or improved. It can only be prevented. ❖



# Rust never sleeps



BY OWEN ROBERTS

If there's one thing wheat stem rust is good for, it's bringing folks together. Lately, those folks include Dr. Norman Borlaug, the Nobel laureate credited with having led the charge to develop stem rust resistant varieties in the 1950s and '60s, when the disease was an epidemic across North America. Then, it took out some 40 per cent of the crop and prompted Borlaug to rally scientists everywhere to put it down through selective breeding.

Two Canadian spring wheat varieties and one durum wheat have very good resistance.

Now, it's raised its head again, this time in Africa. And again, Borlaug, despite being 93 years old, is putting up his dukes.

Borlaug is calling on the world's wheat-producing nations to gather their forces and battle the latest wheat stem rust scourge, known as Ug99 (an amalgam of its place of origin, Uganda, and the year it appeared, 1999). Like Borlaug, it's a fighter, capable of destroying most previously resistant wheat varieties.

But this time there's a twist. Whereas in the middle of the last century wheat stem rust was hammering Canada, this time Canada has among the top resistant varieties.

These genetics could help save the wheat supply everywhere from a woeful fate, and researchers are rallying to bring the resistant varieties into a germplasm bank for everyone's use.

For the past two years, Canadian varieties have been showing their stuff in vast trials at an agricultural research station in Kenya (which borders Uganda). At a patchwork of test plots in an effort dubbed the Global Rust Initiative, involving almost 20 countries, researchers have been conducting trials on 11,000 wheat lines and watching for those with resistance to the disease.

They've found alarmingly few winners. In fact, some major wheat-producing countries had absolutely no varieties that showed resistance.

But Canada was blessed. Of this country's 233 entries (comprising 35 varieties and another 200 advanced breeding lines and test lines), researchers identified two Canadian spring wheat varieties and one durum wheat that have very good resistance, as well as seven durum varieties that have reasonable resistance. That doesn't sound like many, but only Canada and Australia had such results.

None of these lines were Canada's top planted varieties. But they are registered high-quality wheat cultivars that will be useful for producers if Ug99 emerges as a concern here. Currently, a team of 14 Canadian researchers is getting ready to cross these resistant varieties with the big producers.

And if the disease doesn't make it to Canada the exercise will still have tremendous value, because other less fortunate countries might be able to take advantage of our country's genetics.

To Borlaug, though, the stem rust's arrival here is inevitable. "Sooner or later Ug99 will be found throughout the world, including in North America, Europe, Australia and South America."

Dr. Tom Fetch, a plant pathologist with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada in Winnipeg, has worked extensively with Ug99. He agrees with Borlaug's assessment and suspects the vector will be international travellers. "It's likely that at some point, someone will walk it into North America. That's much more likely than spores arriving naturally on the wind," he says. ❖



# Do you know your land's value?

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One trend that we keep a close eye on is land values. Twice a year, FCC compiles and releases the Farmland Values Report, highlighting changes in land values in each province and nationally for most locations in Canada.

The report, which contains 10 years of trend information, is based on 245 benchmark farm properties that FCC has been monitoring since 1985. These properties are zoned for agriculture and represent current land use. FCC appraisers estimate market value using select recent comparable sales, which are reviewed, analyzed and adjusted to benchmark properties.

Farmland Values Reports are released twice a year, in the spring and fall. The current report, which covers July 1 to Dec. 31, 2006, highlights an average increase of 2.5 per cent over the last six months for Canadian farmland. This is Canada's largest increase since 2002 and higher than the 2.1 per cent increase

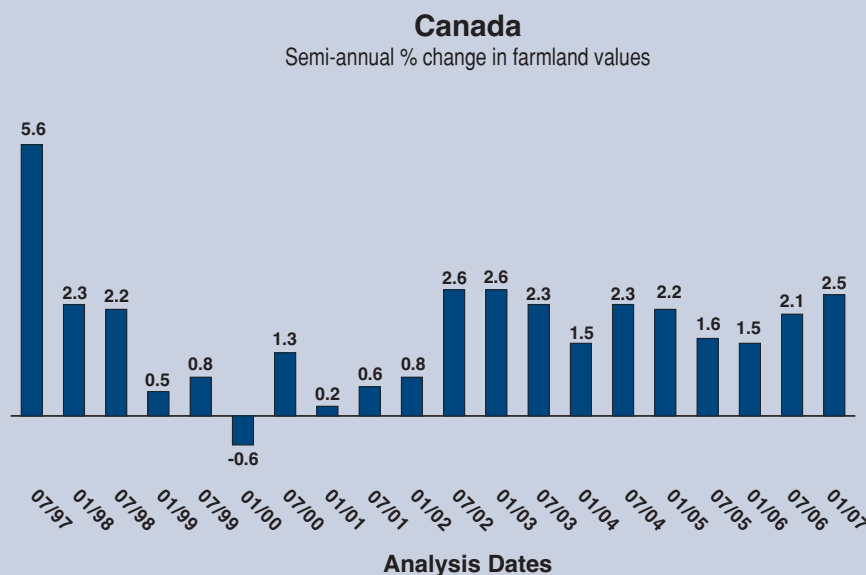
in the first six months of 2006. These increases are consistent with an upward trend since January 2000. No province showed a decrease.

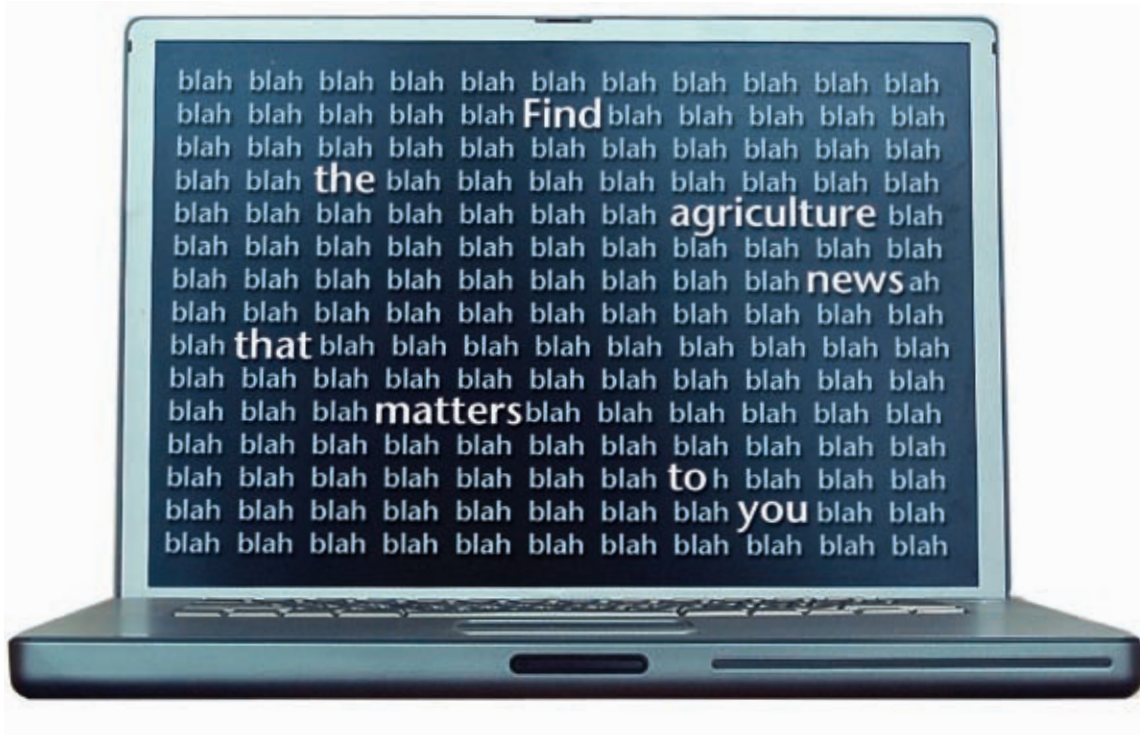
The largest increase is in British Columbia, where values grew by 8.2 per cent. Alberta shows the second largest increase at 4.8 per cent. Manitoba, along with Newfoundland and Labrador, follow with increases at 2.9 and 2.8 per cent respectively. New Brunswick, Ontario and Saskatchewan increased similarly by 1.8, 1.7 and 1.3 per cent respectively.

Quebec and Nova Scotia increased slightly by 0.9 and 0.7 per cent respectively, while values remain the same in Prince Edward Island.

FCC customers who are registered to use our Online Services can see the Farmland Values Report on our website at [www.fcc.ca](http://www.fcc.ca). In addition to the Farmland Values Report, customers can also safely view all of their loan information and access the FCC Management Resource Centre, which has information on Canada's agriculture sectors and financial market trends.

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