

July/August 2007

AgriSuccess

JOURNAL

Fish friendly agriculture

Agricultural practices have been changing in Quebec, enhancing marine habitat in the rivers and streams

Carbon offset trading
becomes reality

Becoming certified
– in a good way

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Editorial board

Lyndon Carlson
Derwin Arnstead
Todd Klink
Lindsay Folk
Tim Kydd
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Roger Shier

Editor-in-chief

Kevin Hursh

Associate editor

Allison Finnamore

Art director

Chloé Gendron

Graphic designer

Wendy Bachelu

Production manager

Nadine Frank

Contributing photographers

Greg Huszar
Saskatchewan Agriculture and
Food, Communications
New Brunswick Agriculture and
Aquaculture

Cover photo

Greg Huszar

Subscription information

Change of address or questions:

Phone: 1-888-332-3301

E-mail: info@AgriSuccess.ca

For undeliverable mail,

please return to:

1800 Hamilton Street,

P.O. Box 4320, Regina, SK S4P 4L3

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On the cover:

Guy Tardif, with several local

producers, is working to clean up

Le Bras River in Quebec.

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Canada

Letter from the editors



FROM KEVIN HURSH AND ALLISON FINNAMORE

Environmentalism has become mainstream. There are still differences of opinion on many issues, but there's been a societal shift towards wanting to do the right things for the world in which we live.

As stewards of the land, producers have a disproportionately large responsibility to environmental issues. Your decisions affect others. Underground aquifers, rivers and streams and the air supply don't respect property lines.

Sometimes caring for the environment is at odds with trying to generate an economic return. Other times, there can actually be an economic benefit by putting the environment first.

This edition of the Journal explores a wide range of environmental issues as well as opportunities. There were so many story ideas that we've suspended our usual young farmer profile. That will return in the next edition.

Your story ideas and comments are always welcome. You can e-mail us through info@AgriSuccess.ca or call 1-888-332-3301.

Kevin Hursh *Allison Finnamore*

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

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 nationwide 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.

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.

Rae Groeneveld

Rae is Farm News Director at GX 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.

Mark Cardwell

Mark Cardwell is a writer and freelance journalist who lives in the Quebec City region. He is a regular correspondent for a dozen newspapers, magazines, trade and specialty publications in Canada, the United States and Europe.

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.

Rocks act as mulch in potato fields

BY ALLISON FINNAMORE

It turns out a long-time nuisance in Atlantic Canadian potato fields is actually useful.

Rock and stones buried in the fields cause excessive wear, breakage and down time of field machinery and damage potato tubers during mechanical harvesting. But removing them resulted in soil compaction, reduced water infiltration and therefore, soil erosion. Researchers have found the balance – crushing the rocks.

Crushing the stones to coarse fragments and leaving them on

the soil surface turns the nuisance into a mulch-like material that provides an important foundation for soil and helps reduce potato damage. Seriously injured tuber numbers went from 38 per cent to 17 per cent. Tuber damage like skinning, flesh wounds or other severe blemishes can add up to \$150 per hectare in some fields and producers can spend about \$50 per hectare removing rocks.

With a \$30,000 or so rock crusher implement mounted on the harvester, the annoying rocks can be obliterated in-field and do some good for the soil and the potatoes.

Digital camera linked to GPS

BY TOM BUTTON

Pictures can be worth a thousand steps. Now you can integrate your GPS system with your digital camera to create photos that remember where you took them.

See a weed escape? Snap a photo so you know exactly where to return with the sprayer. Or, if you're stumped by the weed and want an agronomist to take a look, simply e-mail the photo with its co-ordinates to your dealer.

GPS-Photo Link also helps you set up field management plans. Call up the software's mapping function for each field, then click on the photo links and check out the pictures you've filed over the last year, like the fence post that needs replacing, or the possible nutrient deficiency that you should sample for.

All you need is a Garmin or Magellan GPS plus a digital camera that has date and time capability so you can set the two to exactly the same time. Produced by GeoSpatial Experts (www.geospacialexperts.com), the software is available in Canada for \$279 at distributors, including Prairie Geomatics (www.prairie.mb.ca).

Broccoli banding

BY ALLISON FINNAMORE

A former snowplow operator in Nova Scotia has combined hard work, creativity and determination to invent a machine that's growing in demand.

Roland Swift's creation transfers a rubber band onto vegetables like broccoli at the speed of light. It's also useful for bundling newspaper flyers, mail bundles and its original intent, lobsters.

His cousin challenged and then helped him to invent a contraption to band multiple lobster claws quickly, but Swift soon realized it was a limited market. After some detective work into how broccoli is banded, he realized there were more banding opportunities to explore.

Now, multi-national retail outlets are negotiating with Morswift Machines Inc., operated by Swift and his partner Cliff Morrison, for construction of multi-banding machines for bundling.



Carbon offset trading becomes reality



BY KEVIN HURSH

Some producers in Canada are already reaping benefits from being part of the solution to carbon emissions. Practices such as minimum tillage, composting and seeding cropland to perennial forages – practices that cut carbon emissions – are worth money.

It makes good economic sense to decrease emissions with the least damage to the economy.

Why not just crack down on the emitters? Why allow those big emitters to buy carbon credits from someone else?

Actually, it makes good economic sense to decrease emissions with the least damage to the economy. The emissions that are easiest and cheapest to cut should be done first. With carbon trading, a larger emitter will be able to buy carbon credits from others while working on its own long-term plan for reductions.

The value of carbon in any trading system should increase as further cuts become more difficult and expensive. Since we all share the same atmosphere, it doesn't really matter who makes the cuts, as long as there is a real decrease in carbon emissions.

Unfortunately, it's difficult to know how the future will unfold. And that makes it tough to advise producers on whether to take advantage of the carbon payment programs currently available or wait for potentially better deals.

A carbon offset market is being established in Alberta. In fact, it's been put on a fast track and is supposed to have a regulatory framework by July 1.

Many of Alberta's carbon emitters will either have to put \$15 per tonne of carbon into a fund, or they'll have to

buy carbon credits from primary producers and others who can demonstrate that their practices are cutting the release of carbon.

Companies who need to offset the greenhouse gases they're releasing to the atmosphere want to buy carbon credits from others.

It may seem strange for a company that's a carbon emitter to pay for someone else to cut emissions or sequester carbon in the

soil. Why not just crack down on the emitters? Why allow those big emitters to buy carbon credits from someone else?

Benefits of the Alberta program will only be available to Alberta producers, but many observers believe the Alberta initiative will be a forerunner for a carbon offset trading program that's eventually delivered nationally.

Meanwhile, a company called C-Green Aggregators based in Regina, Sask., has already been contracting with producers for their carbon credits. Earlier this year, they offered a program for producers in the three Prairie provinces for the 2006 to 2010 timeframe. The credits are being sold through the Chicago Climate Exchange.

Officials in Alberta point out that the Chicago Climate Exchange is a voluntary-based trading system. The companies buying the credits may want to be good corporate citizens, or they may want to get in on the ground floor of carbon trading as it evolves.

Officials say the Alberta system will be set by regulations, have higher standards and will probably demand a higher price for carbon. A national system, if established, would probably have similar attributes.

Should producers take what C-Green and others are offering, or will there be a better deal through some government regulated compliance-based system? On its website at www.agric.gov.ab.ca, Alberta Agriculture has information on this topic complete with links to other information sources including C-Green.

It's a complicated topic and the way ahead is uncertain. But carbon offset trading is becoming a reality and it should mean benefits for producers who can demonstrate emission reductions. ❖



Environmental success stories

Man-Dak reaches 25

BY LORNE McCLINTON

Drought no longer implies dust storms on the Canadian prairies. In the 2002 drought, the widespread adoption of zero till and minimum tillage techniques kept the dry soils firmly anchored in place. In 2007, as the Manitoba-North Dakota Zero Tillage Farmers' Association (Man-Dak) celebrates its 25th anniversary, the organization, along with sister organizations in Saskatchewan and Alberta, can rightly claim much of the credit.

Man-Dak first incorporated in 1982 when zero till was still a fringe, unproven technology. They pledged to preserve agricultural soil resources for future generations by promoting the system as a way to drastically reduce soil erosion and build up organic matter. Since then, zero-till acreage has grown to include nearly half the planted acres on the Prairies.

"We started promoting zero tillage as a way to save soil," says Man-Dak executive secretary Alan Ness. "Moisture conservation and improved time management quickly showed up as other benefits. People were also talking about fuel savings but it wasn't really an issue until fuel prices went up."

The association's education efforts are based on the principle of farmers helping farmers. Their zero-till workshops attract producers from across the Prairies and the northern Plains.

Twenty-five years ago, non-selective (glyphosate) herbicides were very expensive and there were no zero-till drills. Popular early workshop topics included how to successfully cut glyphosate rates and how to modify equipment to work under zero till. Since then, zero till has evolved from just seeding technology to an entire production system.

Mushroom production that's easy on the environment

BY OWEN ROBERTS

Mushroom production and environmental sustainability are not often mentioned in the same breath. Besides producing odour, mushroom production yields organic substrate, which has become a problem because of its higher than normal salt content (due to components added during production).

If the substrate is treated to reduce salt, it can be a desirable addition to Ontario fields. It improves soil structure by increasing the water and nutrient holding capacity, and it adds organic matter.

Traditionally, most mushroom farmers reduced the salt by simply leaving the substrate stacked outside for six months, and letting the salt leach out.

But leaching can contaminate surface and groundwater, and with Ontario's new Nutrient Management Act, the industry has been on the lookout for alternatives.

Enter manure treatment specialist Ron Fleming of the University of Guelph Ridgetown Campus. With support from the Canadian Mushroom Growers' Association, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and Rol-Land Farms, Fleming tested two substrate treatment methods, including enhanced composting – a method involving a covered system complete with mechanical turning and forced aeration.

Fleming says the substrate can successfully be composted (and salt content reduced) by mixing it and aerating it for four weeks in an enclosed facility. He figures the composted product can be sold for a premium (up to \$60 per tonne) because it's a uniform, stable organic material.

The higher salt content may rule out some uses. But overall, the compost is of high quality and is weed and disease free.

"Composting is safer for the environment and results in finished compost that has an excellent feel and

appearance,” says Fleming. “Branding this as superior to other composts will be the ultimate factor in whether farmers can reap the benefits.”

Sustainable Poultry Farming Group stands test of time

BY DAVID SCHMIDT

While many environmental initiatives come and go with the government programs that spawn them, one has stood the test of time. In 1991, at the urging of the B.C. government, the Fraser Valley egg, chicken, hatchling and turkey associations formed the Sustainable Poultry Farming Group (SPFG) under the Canada-B.C. Soil Conservation Program. Its mandate: to assess environmental issues regarding poultry production and seek solutions.

“We’re still pretty much within our original mandate,” says Kevin Chipperfield, manager of SPFG since its inception.

As anyone who followed the avian influenza outbreak knows, the central Fraser Valley has the highest

concentration of poultry farms in Canada, with most of them located atop the area’s most important and vulnerable aquifer. Early on, SPFG identified surplus manure as an issue and set about finding distant markets for it. The SPFG now ships to B.C. operations in Delta, the Interior and the Okanagan.

“We handle six to seven per cent of Fraser Valley poultry manure,” Chipperfield says. While Delta vegetable farms were his first market, most are now served by private contractors – which suits him just fine.

“Our goal isn’t to dominate any market. It’s to open up markets.”

While removing excess manure is the direct result, the bigger benefit is the industry co-operation.

“Before SPFG, there wasn’t a lot of interaction among the various boards and associations,” Chipperfield says. “That’s one of the biggest problems in all industries: to get them to work together for the common good rather than the individual good. Environmental issues can provide a forum to work on things in that way.” ❖



Barley seeded with a no-till seeder in St. Quentin, New Brunswick.

Photo provided by New Brunswick Agriculture and Aquaculture.

Fish-friendly *agriculture*

BY MARK CARDWELL

You don't have to tell Guy Tardif about the problems created when riverbanks erode, carrying earth and vegetation downstream. That's because the Quebec blueberry producer can see it happen from the kitchen window of his farmhouse in the Beauce region, a half-hour's drive south of Quebec City.

"I've got a front-row seat," Tardif says about the destruction caused by Le Bras River, which runs behind his house and through the heart of his 58-hectare farm. "I sometimes see big chunks of my land just break off and float away."

That's why he was quick to join a committee started by several local farmers in 2002, with the specific goal of cleaning up the river to improve wildlife habitat and putting an end to chronic problems like erosion. With technical aid and funding from a variety of farming, government and conservation groups, the Comité de valorisation de la Rivière Le Bras identified several key problems and drew up a list of remedial actions that are now being implemented.

One of the committee's key initiatives – and successes, according to Tardif – has been to work with a group of producers (who own roughly three-quarters of the land through which the two branches of the 75-kilometre-long river run) to change old agricultural practices that have been proven harmful. For example, growers are now asked not to plant crops within one to three metres of the river's edge, connecting streams or drainage ditches, allowing soil-retaining grasses to grow and river- and bank-dwelling animals to flourish.

At the same time, producers both next to and near the river are being encouraged to till their fields lightly in early spring before they apply fertilizer, most of which is in liquid form in this hog-intensive region. Doing so, Tardif explains, breaks the icy clay layer on top, allowing the phosphorus-rich manure to penetrate into the soil and

not run off. Tardif also started planting 300 to 400 trees and shrubs along the banks of the river on his property – another erosion-fighting, committee-led initiative.

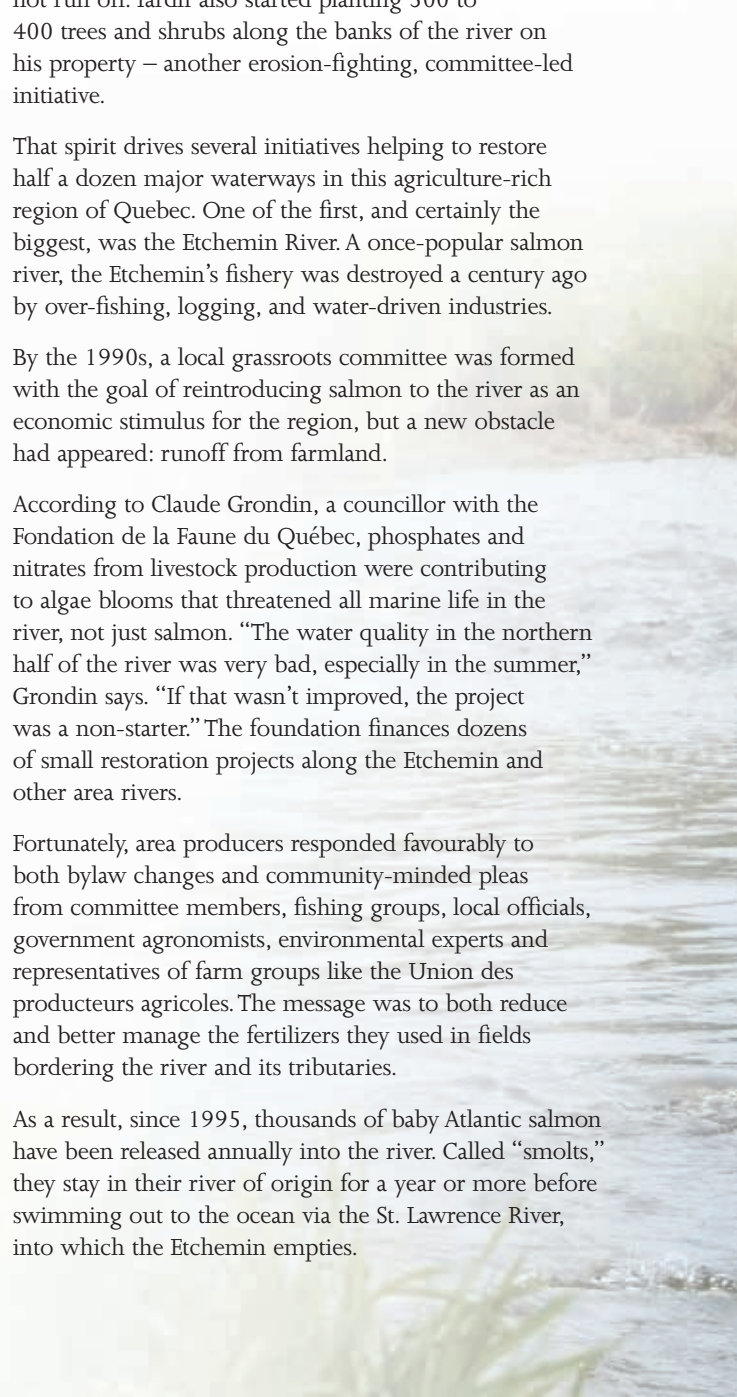
That spirit drives several initiatives helping to restore half a dozen major waterways in this agriculture-rich region of Quebec. One of the first, and certainly the biggest, was the Etchemin River. A once-popular salmon river, the Etchemin's fishery was destroyed a century ago by over-fishing, logging, and water-driven industries.

By the 1990s, a local grassroots committee was formed with the goal of reintroducing salmon to the river as an economic stimulus for the region, but a new obstacle had appeared: runoff from farmland.

According to Claude Grondin, a councillor with the Fondation de la Faune du Québec, phosphates and nitrates from livestock production were contributing to algae blooms that threatened all marine life in the river, not just salmon. "The water quality in the northern half of the river was very bad, especially in the summer," Grondin says. "If that wasn't improved, the project was a non-starter." The foundation finances dozens of small restoration projects along the Etchemin and other area rivers.

Fortunately, area producers responded favourably to both bylaw changes and community-minded pleas from committee members, fishing groups, local officials, government agronomists, environmental experts and representatives of farm groups like the Union des producteurs agricoles. The message was to both reduce and better manage the fertilizers they used in fields bordering the river and its tributaries.

As a result, since 1995, thousands of baby Atlantic salmon have been released annually into the river. Called "smolts," they stay in their river of origin for a year or more before swimming out to the ocean via the St. Lawrence River, into which the Etchemin empties.



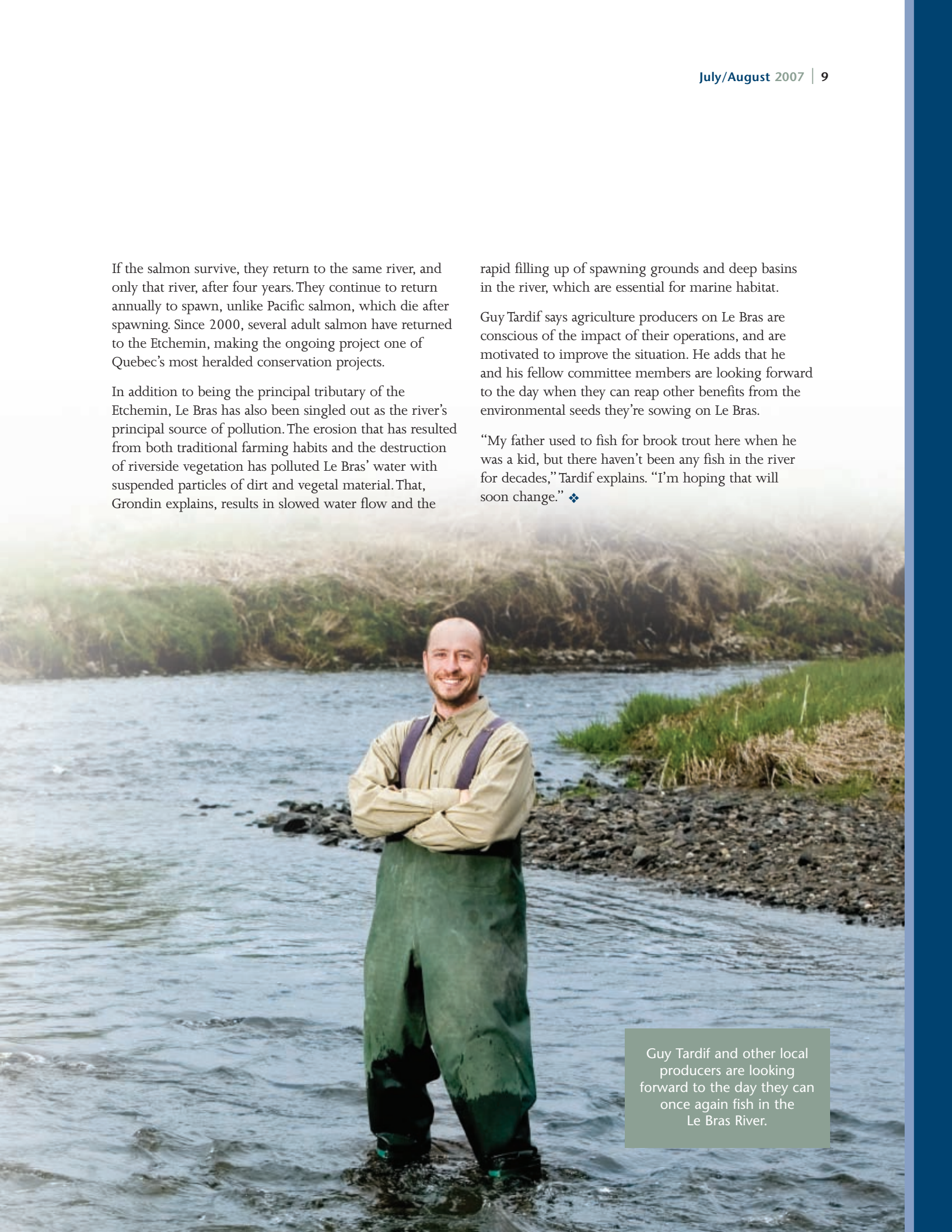
If the salmon survive, they return to the same river, and only that river, after four years. They continue to return annually to spawn, unlike Pacific salmon, which die after spawning. Since 2000, several adult salmon have returned to the Etchemin, making the ongoing project one of Quebec's most heralded conservation projects.

In addition to being the principal tributary of the Etchemin, Le Bras has also been singled out as the river's principal source of pollution. The erosion that has resulted from both traditional farming habits and the destruction of riverside vegetation has polluted Le Bras' water with suspended particles of dirt and vegetal material. That, Grondin explains, results in slowed water flow and the

rapid filling up of spawning grounds and deep basins in the river, which are essential for marine habitat.

Guy Tardif says agriculture producers on Le Bras are conscious of the impact of their operations, and are motivated to improve the situation. He adds that he and his fellow committee members are looking forward to the day when they can reap other benefits from the environmental seeds they're sowing on Le Bras.

"My father used to fish for brook trout here when he was a kid, but there haven't been any fish in the river for decades," Tardif explains. "I'm hoping that will soon change." ❖

A man with a beard and short hair, wearing a light-colored long-sleeved shirt and dark green waders, stands in a river with his arms crossed. The river is surrounded by grassy banks and some rocks. The background is slightly hazy.

Guy Tardif and other local producers are looking forward to the day they can once again fish in the Le Bras River.



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Take a bow for your environmental efforts



BY ALLISON FINNAMORE

The comment that agriculture producers are the original stewards of the land is one I've heard repeatedly over the years.

Usually it's a comment of self-reflection, made when producers are discussing the work done on their own farm to take care of the environment. Rarely is the statement made outside the inner circle.

Every step along
the environmental
farm plan route
helps make
the world a
better place.

Hindsight is 20/20 and like everyone, there was a time when agriculture didn't fully understand the impact of common practices. Producers, however, were certainly some of the first to see the outcomes, and seeing that impact led to change.

Canadian producers have been working for years at softening the environmental footprint left behind when growing food. One prime example is the voluntary Pesticide Container Recycling Program, spearheaded by CropLife Canada. Since it began in 1989, 60 million containers from this country's farms have been moved to 1,100 collection sites.

Currently, producers turn in 5.5 million containers a year. That's a 70 per cent return rate – the highest in the world, according to CropLife. The recycling is taken a step further when the containers are shredded and cast into fence posts. Hand in hand with the container-return program is the safe disposal of over 1.4 million pounds of obsolete pesticides.

Other management practices have changed as well. Spraying the lane with waste oil to keep the dust down used to be an accepted practice. Now waste oil is collected and sent for recycling.

And producers are much more careful to protect water sources in their pesticide mixing and spraying operations.

Practices on the farm were changing long before climate change issues started making the front pages of newspapers across the country. Since the farm is usually the home for the farm family, there's a vested interest in protecting the water supply and making sure environmental problems aren't passed to the next generation.

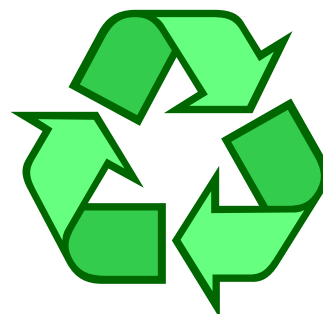
In recent years, agriculture has gone a step further with environmental farm plans (EFPs), which challenge producers to look at all aspects of the farm and find changes to further the care of the earth. Often an EFP is a chance for additional learning about current environmental practices.

Even more, it's a map. Just as your business plan helps you reach short and long-term business goals and your succession plan helps facilitate the handing over of the farm to the next generation, an EFP can help you reach green goals. Without a map, it's hard to know where you're going and it can be easy to get lost.

These basic agriculture environmental programs have laid the foundation for bigger programs, broader thinking and stronger action. It's an issue that will not go away.

They may not be headline-grabbing news, but every pesticide container that's returned and every step along the environmental farm plan route help make the world a better place.

Agriculture producers, take a bow and give yourselves a pat on the back – and keep up the good work. ❖



Marketing environmentally friendly beef

BY RAE GROENEVELD

Two messages have become the mantra for improving the bottom line on farms: reduce your cost of production and move further up the value chain. A group of cattle ranchers has taken both messages to heart and is now starting to reap the rewards of a low-cost, high-value beef production system.

Prairie Heritage Beef is made up of 16 cattle ranches across Saskatchewan and Alberta. As a group, they sell environmentally friendly low-cost beef directly to consumers who are willing to pay more.

“I like to refer to our beef as the eco-committed choice. You know it’s economically and ecologically produced,” says Christoph Weder, chair of Prairie Heritage Beef. He also runs Spirit View Ranch in Rycroft, Alta.

The program is modeled after the highly successful Country Natural Beef in the United States. The concept is based on getting a fair price for beef that is produced without antibiotics or growth promoters and is not fed any animal by-products, while following good environmental stewardship and animal welfare practices.

When they started three years ago, Prairie Heritage Beef recognized they had to go beyond what some existing natural beef programs had been doing.

“We felt that marketing beef just basically on the grounds of no antibiotics and no growth promotants were pretty shallow attributes. I felt we had to go deeper and differentiate ourselves to the next level,” Weder says.

That meant all producers in their program had to complete an environmental farm plan and enrol in the Verified Beef Production program. This provides a level of certification, verifying the group’s production claims.

The paperwork is a bit more onerous, admits Bruce Chern, who operates Goldenview Ranch at Stockholm, Sask., and is a member of Prairie Heritage Beef. But because they are environmentalists themselves, the program is a great fit.

“We love to have the bio-diversity on the ranch. This area is not just for us, it’s for the deer, it’s for the ducks, it’s for the wildlife.”

Chern says the production benefits from an environmental approach to their cattle business have been substantial. It has helped to reduce the cost of raising their livestock and has improved the efficiency of their ranch.

“We want to be very sustainable on our grass production. You know we use a lot of legumes in our mix so we don’t worry about buying artificial nitrogen. The legumes fix the nitrogen from the atmosphere and our grass crops are second to none.”

The members of Prairie Heritage Beef are so confident in the production of their cattle in this environmentally friendly and intensified animal welfare regime that they invite consumers and the public to their ranches to see how their program works.

Marketing

Prairie Heritage Beef started by selling their brand of beef in Thrifty Food Stores on Vancouver Island. Some members even spent time in the supermarkets talking to consumers about their beef and its attributes.

“Two years ago no one wanted to talk to us about natural beef, except for the one market we were in. Now, all the competitors on the Island want to have it and we’ve got some markets that are going to be developing this summer across Canada,” Weder says.

The beef is sold at a price that ensures Prairie Heritage Beef members are making a profit. Weder says they have factored in the cost of production for their cattle and included a profit margin. The end results are a finished animal returning \$1.06 to \$1.08 per pound to the producer.

“This program is based on fair trade practices, meaning our prices are set on a cost of production, return on investment basis as opposed to so many cents over and above the commodity market,” Weder explains.

Chern says this has made a big difference to the sustainability of their ranch. They now calve later in the spring and retain ownership of the cattle longer. They deliver 800- to 900-pound animals, which creates better profit margins.

“If we weren’t in Prairie Heritage Beef we would probably be selling our calves at 400 to 500 pounds and we’d have been taking a licking on them right now. We couldn’t afford to keep our ranch sustainable and functioning selling 400- to 500-pound calves at a dollar to a dollar-ten per pound.”

The future

As the demand increases, the number of animals required for production is expanding. However, Prairie Heritage Beef is still well within its own production capacity. They estimate most of the 16 ranches have only 25 per cent of their production going into the Prairie Heritage program. About 2,000 head of cattle were produced for their market last year.

“I would love nothing more than for this thing to grow so we can bring some young 30- to 40-year-old ranchers on board and make sure there is some sustainable growth in farming in their communities,” Weder says.

He’s also looking to implement a more stringent certification procedure from the United States as part of their program. His hope is that it will bring stronger verification to the group and give the consumer an added level of confidence. ❖

Cattle on the Goldenview Ranch,
Stockholm, Saskatchewan.

Photo provided by Saskatchewan
Agriculture and Food,
Communications



Becoming certified – in a positive way



BY HUGH MAYNARD

Are you fit to be certified? It may seem that way with the ever-increasing number of compliance programs that agriculture enterprises are now being offered and, in some cases, are obliged to sign up for. The question is: what's in it for you, as the producer and the one who has to bear the burden of certification?

Certifications must be viewed in relation to the scope of each producer's activities.

what you want to get out of the certification exercise.

The difference between an environmental farm plan (EFP) and ISO 14000 certification provides a useful comparison: An EFP is an assessment tool and a guide when it comes to the agri-environment. It helps identify problems such as excessive soil erosion, and it provides a framework for corrective action. When changes are planned, it provides the means to anticipate environmental impacts of new facilities or practices. (More information on EFPs can be found on the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada website at www.agr.gc.ca/env/efp-pfa).

An EFP helps you be a better steward of the surrounding environment, and demonstrates that you are taking responsibility for your activities in this regard. Every operation should have one. But once the assessment is done and the plan in place, it's up to you to follow through. The value of the EFP is largely related to the effort you put into its application three, five and more years down the road.

The International Standards Organization (ISO) takes things up a notch. The 14.001 standard (14000 is used for general reference, while various sub-categories are represented by 14.001, 14.002, etc.) institutes

an environmental management system that focuses producers on environmental compliance, risk prevention and continuous improvement. And you get to be audited. And then you get to start the process over again every three years. (Visit www.isostandardsguide.com for more information.)

The ISO 14000 protocol not only includes analysis and planning, but also implementation, monitoring, review and environmental policy. The reward for all this additional effort is not only a certificate, but substantial proof of environmental responsibility you can take forward when dealing with government, bankers and insurers.

Obviously, these certifications must be viewed in relation to the scope of each producer's activities. An extensive cow-calf operation far removed from an urban centre is not in the same situation as an intensive hydroponic greenhouse facility just outside the city limits.

But regardless of the certification standard chosen, both operations stand to benefit – as long as the certification incorporates a planning process. That way, there's a benefit to the environment and a management payback to the operation as well, because planning is always a positive thing. ❖



Who's looking out for you?



BY PETER VAN DONGEN

While waiting at the doctor's office recently, I picked up an old issue of Reader's Digest and came across a story about Bruce Osiowy. The name immediately rang a bell – unfortunately for all the wrong reasons.

The Saskatchewan grain producer had been involved in a serious farm accident in June 2003. Osiowy was operating a rock picker when a transport arm jammed. He dismounted the tractor and managed to put the mechanical arm back into position, but caught his fingers in the process. He was stuck.

You never know what might happen, so it's important to be prepared.

Osiowy had his cell phone with him, but had left it in the tractor. In fact, he could hear it ringing as he lay trapped beneath the machine. Desperate to get someone's attention, he used a wrench to bang loudly against the rock

picker. Two producers heard his faint pleas, but concluded he was probably just fixing machinery.

Osiowy lived by himself, and with no one aware of his whereabouts all he could do was wait for help. Wearing only a short-sleeved shirt and jeans, he passed the hours in the company of his dog, Gopher, who helped to keep him warm. Twelve hours passed, then 24, then 48, and still no one came to help. Osiowy had to take matters into his own hands – literally.

Growing ever more weary and delusional from going nearly three days without food and water, Osiowy managed to free himself by cutting off his thumb and index finger with a pocket knife. By the time he got medical attention – some 66 hours after his ordeal began – infection had set in and doctors had to amputate his hand.

As I read Osiowy's story, I recalled all the times I've worked alone in isolated locations. His story is a good reminder that you never know what might happen, so it's important to be prepared.

Producers, by their very nature, tend to be independent. In fact, the Canadian Agricultural Injury Surveillance Program found that 60 per cent of Canadian producers work alone where assistance is not readily available in the event of injury, illness or emergency. Fortunately, there are some simple steps that can help prevent unexpected trouble from becoming far more serious.

Here are a few tips:

- **Communicate your plan.** Let someone know what you are doing, where you are going, how you will get there and when you expect to return. Set pre-determined check-in times based on the degree of hazard involved with the job.
- **Establish an effective communication system.** Use cell phones, radio or some other reliable two-way communication device to maintain contact. Whatever you use, keep it within reach at all times. Osiowy now carries an emergency GPS locator that alerts a call centre in case of trouble.
- **Set up a buddy system.** Make arrangements with a family member or neighbouring grower to check in on each other with a phone call or a visit throughout the day, and to come look for each other if you do not return as expected.

Whether you farm on your own or assign an employee to complete a task on his or her own, the key to staying safe is staying connected. ❖



Cloned meat: slick, or ick?



BY OWEN ROBERTS

Imagine a livestock industry in which there is virtually no guessing about whether sons and daughters will share their parents' desirable traits, such as superior meat quality or milk production. That's been the decade-plus promise of animal cloning, a technique designed to propagate near-identical copies of the best of the best.

So why was there so little cheering earlier this year when the U.S. Department of Agriculture declared cloned meat safe for human consumption? If clones are that good, this should have been cause for celebration.

Almost two-thirds of Americans are uncomfortable with animal cloning.

American polling shows cloned meat is high on the "ick" factor scale. Anti-technologists can easily portray it as genetically manipulated Frankenstock, even though it isn't.

In fact, the opposite is true. There are no transgenic, gene-combining unnatural unions involved. Rather,

the industry wants to preserve the integrity of the donor DNA, because it's top quality.

Rather than inseminate a series of cows with the desirable semen, leading to offspring with genetics from both the mother and father, the genetic material from the mother's immature egg is removed, and then DNA from the donor is inserted. That way, only the father's genetics are expressed. You pretty well know exactly what you're getting.

The first cloned animals arrived on the scene in the mid-'80s, but reached their popularity peak with the arrival of Dolly the sheep in 1996. She was cloned from an adult udder cell. The technology suffered a minor public relations setback when Dolly was euthanized due to normal disease complications, but she became a cloning icon.

Dolly was science, not food. Now, that has changed.

With the U.S. livestock industry pushing hard, regulatory authorities are testing the public's tolerance level. In 2002, the prestigious U.S. National Academy of Sciences

studied meat and milk from cloned animals, and declared it safe to eat.

But it also called for another study, a U.S. scientific panel, which gathered 13 studies from around the world about the meat and milk composition from clones and their offspring.

In a report published in January in an animal reproduction scientific journal called *Theriogenology*, the panel said there's no nutritional or toxicological difference between cloned and conventional animals in vitamins, minerals, proteins and fat.

Some analysts say that report will convince the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to give cloned meat and milk the green light.

However, there's still the public perception problem. In advance of the *Theriogenology* journal report, a survey by the Pew Initiative on Food and Biotechnology (pewagbiotech.org) revealed almost two-thirds of Americans are uncomfortable with animal cloning. Well over one-third believes food from clones is unsafe.

Canada is the No. 1 market for U.S. agricultural exports, a record \$10.6 billion in 2005. It seems inevitable that meat emanating from animals born from cloned sires is headed our way.

That doesn't bother Prof. Allan King of the Ontario Veterinary College at the University of Guelph. King, Canada Research Chair in Animal Reproductive Biotechnology, and his research team are following a group of daughters of a cattle clone to study their growth and other developmental features.

He's convinced they are essentially no different. "In light of our work, and the USDA report," says King, "when it comes to meat from clones or their offspring, I say light up the barbecue." ❖

Honouring Canadian women in agriculture

Across Canada, there are women who give of themselves in their communities and beyond – producers, veterinarians, teachers, researchers, agribusiness operators – you name it.

This year, to celebrate their many contributions, the FCC Board of Directors created the Farm Credit Canada Rosemary Davis Award. Rosemary Davis was named FCC's first female Board of Directors Chair in 2000. Under her leadership, FCC's portfolio grew from \$5.8 billion to \$12 billion. She was instrumental in the success of the FCC AgriSpirit Fund and supported Parliament's passing of the new Farm Credit Canada Act in 2001.

To honour her work and the importance of women in agriculture, this year's Award recipients are: Ontario's Gertie Blake, Quebec's Jacynthe Gagnon, Alberta's Mabel Hamilton, Saskatchewan's Noreen Johns and Newfoundland and Labrador's Kay Young.

"Women have always played an important role on their farms and in recent years, more women are becoming advocates for the industry," recipient Kay Young says.

The five recipients each won a trip to the 2007 ATHENA International Conference in Chicago, which focuses on building leadership skills and provides attendees with great networking opportunities.

Congratulations to these winners!



Gertie Blake, Hanover, Ontario

A strong work ethic and commitment to helping Ontario farmers improve their economic, social and political environment are what drive Gertie Blake, a former pork producer and current member service representative for the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA).

Whether it was checking on neighbouring farms during the 1998 ice storm or involves working with OFA directors, Gertie always leads by example.



Jacynthe Gagnon, La Malbaie, Quebec

As president of l'Union des producteurs agricoles (UPA) and co-owner of a hog and beef operation, Jacynthe's commitment to agriculture continues to grow.

Since 2002, Jacynthe has been a member of the forum on farm transfers and start-ups, and a member of the committee to promote and enhance agriculture. She is also a member of the Fonds de développement regional committee of the Conférence régionale des élus

(regional conference of elected officers) for the Quebec City region and is a member of CRÉ's board of directors.



Mabel Hamilton, Innisfail, Alberta

Mabel has served on several industry boards, including the Alberta Cattle Commission and Canadian Cattlemen's Association.

The first female chair of both the Beef Information Centre and Canadian Beef Breeds Council, Mabel was also president of the Canadian Angus Association. She is currently an adult adviser for the Alberta Junior Angus Association, is chair of the Canadian Cattle Identification Agency and represents the cattle industry on the Industry Government Advisory Council.



Noreen Johns, Allan, Saskatchewan

Noreen has held various executive roles in the Saskatchewan Women's Agricultural Network (SWAN) and the Canadian Farm Women's Network.

She influenced Statistics Canada's reporting criteria to include recognition of women as farm operators. She also persuaded the Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture to declare a special week to recognize farm women.



Kay Young, Lethbridge, Newfoundland and Labrador

Kay is a former provincial Member of the House of Assembly, Minister of Social Services and Minister Responsible for the Status of Women. She is a founding member of the Goose Head Farm Women's Association, the Provincial Farm

Women's Association of Newfoundland and Labrador, and the Canadian Farm Women's Network.

Other contributions have included serving on the G.B. Cross Hospital Board chairing the Bonavista Peninsula and Surrounding Area Community Futures Committee.

If you know someone who deserves to be recognized for her leadership in agriculture, visit www.fcc.ca for nomination details. Nominations are open until November 2007. ❖

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