

farm **to** table

FOLLOWING THE PATH OF CANADIAN FOOD • Vol.1 / No.2 • Fall 2014

Land values

Why rising investments in agricultural regions have some farmers concerned



Sizing up our potential

Are better policies the fuel Canada's food makers need to grow?

Better together

The tight-knit nature of farmers and food manufacturers



We share the same table



“We take pride in knowing we would feel safe consuming any of the crops we sell. If we would not use it ourselves it does not go to market.”

- Katelyn Duncan, Saskatchewan

“The natural environment is critical to farmers – we depend on soil and water for the production of food. But we also live on our farms, so it’s essential that we act as responsible stewards.”

- Doug Chorney, Manitoba



“The welfare of my animals is one of my highest priorities. If I don’t give my cows a high quality of life they won’t grow up to be great cows.”

- Andrew Campbell, Ontario

Safe food; animal welfare; sustainability; people care deeply about these things when they make food choices. And the agriculture industry cares deeply about them too – not just to ensure a bright future for our industry, but to feed our own families for generations to come.

The journey from farm to table is a conversation everyone should be a part of. So let’s talk about it, together.

Ag More Than Ever is an industry-driven cause to improve and create realistic perceptions of Canadian agriculture. Visit AgMoreThanEver.ca to learn more.

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Abbotsford, B.C., poultry farmer Kerry Froese is among the farmers nationwide who are concerned about the persistent impact of land purchases by corporate buyers and non-farm investors. Photo by Free Rein Photography.



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Why food is everyone's business



Ron Bonnett,
President

Canadian Federation of Agriculture

As a farmer myself, I want Canadians

to feel safe about their food choices and confident in the work farmers do. It's becoming increasingly disheartening to hear the widespread misunderstandings – assumptions, for example, that farmers are contaminating food and feed without regard to human health, depleting natural resources without any mitigation methods in place or that farms are large, corporate entities that are run by hands-off businesses. This is simply not true. In fact, 98% of Canadian farms are family run and operated!

I think of Bertha and Vernon Campbell of Prince Edward Island who started their farm “from scratch” with a modest herd of 20 milk cows and 40 acres of potatoes and has grown today into 2000 acres of rotational crops, a dairy herd of 75 milking cows and 150 beef cattle. Or Lydia Ryall, a young farmer from British Columbia that operates a 10 acre certified organic farm that produces food ten months of the year through seasonal extension techniques like low tunnels and movable greenhouses. And Bryan and Cathy Gilvesy on a ranch in Ontario who installed hedgerows with bee nesting structures as part of their efforts to support the local ecosystem and protect pollinators.

I don't want to challenge anyone's ideologies or food preferences, but I do want to set the record straight about Canadian farms and food. There's a difference in the Canadian brand and it's one to be proud of. I encourage our readers to start asking questions – to look into what Canadian farms and food manufacturers have to offer – and I hope this publication provides some insight. ●



Nancy Croitoru,
President and CEO

Food & Consumer Products of Canada

In every community and in every home

across our great country, Canada's food and beverage manufacturers are a big part of Canadians' lives, every day.

Canadians rely on our industry to save them time, feed their families, provide them with well-paying jobs and enrich their lives.

While our sector is essential in bringing food and beverages to Canadians, our industry is facing some of the most difficult and challenging economic times companies can remember. Higher input costs, the fluctuating Canadian dollar, an improving yet still outdated regulatory environment, retail consolidation and changing consumer preferences are putting pressure on manufacturers. As a result, we've seen companies forced to cut costs, reduce new product innovation, close plants and cut jobs. Today, growth in our sector, if happening at all, is at half the rate of overall manufacturing.

It's a concerning situation for an industry that is central to Canada's economy, and is responsible for ensuring Canadians have high quality and safe food, grown and manufactured here at home.

But challenge gives rise to opportunity, and our industry is game. As Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall said: Canada has enormous potential to succeed as a food superpower.

We agree. That is why it's vital that governments and decision makers across the country take even more notice of our sector and better appreciate the impact it has on the economy and on the health of Canadians.

Because from farm to table, there is an enormous trickle-down effect food and beverage production has on the economy, and on all Canadians' lives, every day. ●

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The growing bonds between farmers and food makers

By Randall Mang

It is a relationship that has already spanned two family generations and nearly six decades. But Ontario farmer Dan Sopuch's connection with Campbell Company of Canada is going strong.

As one of several local growers whose carrots are used in Campbell's soups and broths, Sopuch's relationship is reflective of Campbell Canada's deep roots in rural Ontario, where it set up shop in Etobicoke more than 80 years ago.

"When we started production in 1931, we were surrounded by fields," says Campbell spokesperson Melanie Rockliff, noting that today, about 70 per cent of the ingredients used to make Campbell's products in Canada come from farms within a 100-kilometre radius of the plant.

It is a story that is well told among Canadian food makers and growers. Canadian food manufacturers purchase some 35 per cent of Canadian farm production, and use it to produce food products exported to more than 190 countries annually. The close relationship between growers and manufacturers has also yielded a spate of innovations.

For example, Campbell Canada's daily supply of white and cremini mushrooms shipped by Leamington and Wellington farms (2.5 million pounds annually) includes a novel vitamin D-enhanced variety. Used in Campbell's Cream of Mushroom soup, growers achieve the high vitamin D content by simply exposing the mushrooms to UV light, amplifying the sun's natural effect.

In Ontario, Campbell also buys 1.5 million pounds of celery, 13 million pounds of potatoes and 12 million pounds of carrots from farms in Shelburne, Chatham and Queen'sville as well as Holland Marsh, a community of some 125 growers including the Sopuch family and their 150-acre farm.

Dan Sopuch grew up working on the family farm, which his father started in 1947. "My dad's first celery contract with Campbell was in 1957. In 1962, we got our first contract to supply carrots."

Today, about 30 acres of the family farm are dedicated to growing carrots for Campbell. To meet Campbell's goal of receiving fresh carrots year-round, Sopuch combined his ability to grow quality, storable carrots with an investment in cold storage facilities. The combination enables him to keep his harvest optimally chilled and farm fresh for months,

until the carrots are used to make the hearty soups.

Sopuch uses other high-tech gear on his farm too, including a harvester that cuts celery into four-inch sticks and separates the leaves. "The processor receives celery with less unusable product, which increases productivity in the (manufacturing) plant," says Sopuch.

Susan Abel, vice president, safety & compliance, at Food & Consumer Products of Canada, says, "Canadian farmers are amongst the world's most technologically savvy. Through carefully developed partnerships with farmers, food and beverage manufacturers produce safe, high quality and affordable food that Canadians deserve and rely on every day." ●



Dan Sopuch is among the nearby growers that supply Campbell Canada's Ontario facility.





A worldview on agriculture

By Sophie Perreault, Executive Vice-President and Chief Operating Officer, Farm Credit Canada

Facing unparalleled global change, what we do and how we do it has never been so important to so many people

Canada's agriculture and agri-food industry is filled with big challenges and incredible opportunities. The pace of change and the scope of the market we serve is expansive, exhilarating and daunting – all at the same time. I can't imagine having it any other way.

The world's middle class is growing at a breathtaking pace. According to Gordon Brown, the United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education, the number of people who fit into that category will double from two billion in 2013 to four billion in 2020. That's great news, because it means a better quality of life for a lot of people. And better quality of life means more nutritious diets with greater variety and more protein.

It also means the demand for those kinds of foods is going to be greater than ever before. Again, that's great news for countries like Canada. We're one of just a handful of nations capable of producing and exporting the kind of food the world is looking for. It's a huge job, and our industry is up to the task.

Canadian agriculture is innovative, vibrant and diverse. It's built on a foundation of producers who are very good at what they do. They care deeply about farming because to them, farming is more than a job. Consider this: according to Statistics Canada, 98 per cent of Canadian farms are family farms. That means the people who grow what we eat every day want the same things we all want for our fami-

lies – safe, wholesome food. It's also why the industry is constantly improving and producing more than ever, all while significantly reducing its impact on our environment. If you haven't set foot on a Canadian farm lately, I encourage you to do so. You might be amazed at what you see.

That commitment to getting better extends beyond the farm. Canada's food processors are among the most innovative and responsive in the

world. They've had to be. Consumer demands never stop changing, and those changes mean new opportunities, and no one has been better at seeing – and seizing them.

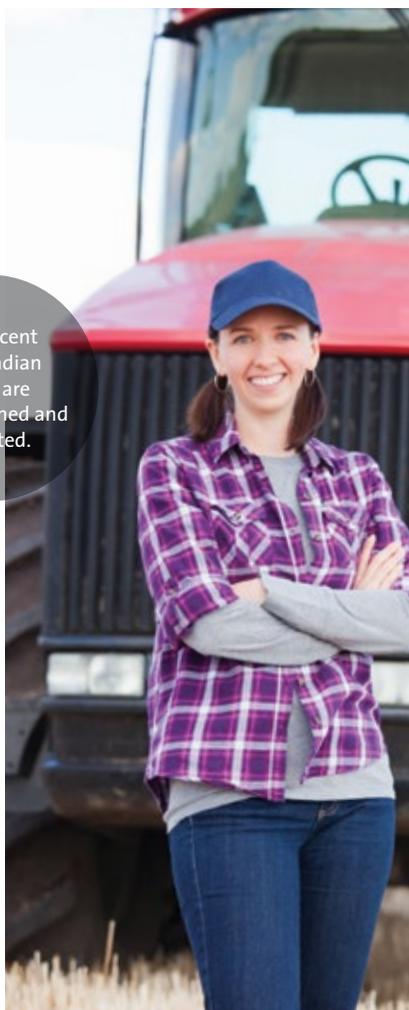
Keeping Canadian agriculture moving forward will take a team effort from players on and off the farm. From one end of the value chain to the other, around the corner or around the globe, it's always taken teamwork to advance the industry, and it always will.

All of us who are involved in agriculture have the opportunity, and the challenge, to take a long-term view – and to think, speak and act in ways that serve the industry and all who depend on it. Our world is getting bigger and smaller at the same time. What we do, and how we do it, has never been so important to so many people.

That's great news too, because even though Canadian agriculture has its ups and downs, what makes us great isn't going to change. When you surround yourself with passionate, knowledgeable people, you're bound to succeed. ●

Sophie Perreault was appointed executive vice-president and chief operating officer of Farm Credit Canada, in August, 2014. She earned a bachelor of science degree in agricultural economics from Laval University and started her career at FCC as a lender before moving to several other leadership positions in the organization. Sophie is a board member for the Regina Food Bank as well as SOFIA house, a shelter for women and children.

98 per cent of Canadian farms are family owned and operated.



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plan

Beth Wangari is one of 450 million smallholders worldwide, who produce over 25% of the world's food. As one of the world's leading agricultural companies, we're committed to empowering smallholders like Beth, so they can increase their yields sustainably and become more profitable. But it doesn't stop there. In The Good Growth Plan, we have set out six measurable ways in which we'll help farmers to overcome major farming challenges by 2020. And we're ready to work with growers, governments, NGOs and all who share this agenda. To learn more about The Good Growth Plan, our six commitments and the progress we are making, visit www.goodgrowthplan.com

When non-farm investors *flood* *our fields*

**Is a trend towards investor acquisition of farmland
a threat to food security and our agricultural roots?**

By Marjo Johne





PHOTO: FREE REIN PHOTOGRAPHY

Like the raspberries his father used to grow, Kerry Froese's life is rooted deeply in the rich soil of his family's farm in Abbotsford, B.C.

"My dad started the farm in 1977 and we were in raspberries originally," recalls Froese, who is also chair of the Canadian Young Farmers' Forum, a national organization that offers education and support to young and new farmers across Canada.

Froese, whose family farm now raises broiler chickens, hopes to see his four children follow in his footsteps, but a recent development in the country's agriculture sector is making him worry about his family's future in farming.

In recent years, as the burgeoning global population has driven up demand for food, and low interest rates combined with high crop prices have boosted land prices, Canada's farmlands have become increasingly attractive to domestic and foreign investors seeking an agriculture play. Today, an estimated 500,000 acres of Canadian farmland are owned by non-farmer investor groups.

"There's definitely a growing interest in agriculture as an investment," observes Ron Bonnett, president of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA) and owner of a dairy farm in Bruce Mines in northern Ontario. "For a number of years, agriculture has been viewed as an area where there's not a lot of opportunity, so it's really nice for a change to see agriculture as a darling for investment communities."

While the heightened interest has its upside – and investor groups collectively own just a small parcel of the country's 160 million acres of farmland – the trend is enough to get farmers such as Bonnett and Froese wondering about the short- and long-term impact of non-farmer ownership. Will it push up the price of land even higher, to the point where it becomes almost impossible for young farmers to get in the game? Could attractive purchase offers tempt many farming families to sell their land?

There are other questions to consider: Over time, will Canada's agriculture sector, which has been built and sustained over decades on the family farm model, be run largely by non-farmer corporations and investors, ending a tradition of stewardship that has lasted for generations?

"It makes it harder to make a succession plan to pass the farm down to the next generation," says Froese, who admits, "Farmers feel the onus is on us to continue farming, but it would be tough to say 'no' to a multi-million dollar deal."

Bonnett says some farmers worry about the possibility of investor owners limiting producers' access to available farmland. Others fear that legislative loopholes could, over the long term, result in Canada losing sovereignty over its own farmlands while foreign investors take over.

There's also the idea that investment trusts may be putting farmers at a competitive disadvantage by allowing non-farmers to invest with pre-tax RRSP dollars. "It isn't widespread now, but it's one of the issues that we've flagged with the Ministry of Finance," says Bonnett.

These are all valid – and timely – concerns. In the international arena, there is much talk about land grabs in developing countries by investors from wealthier nations. The Oakland Institute, an independent policy think tank based out of Oakland, California, describes land grabbing as a global phenomenon that threatens food security.

While the entry of non-farmer investors into Canada's agriculture sector doesn't quite raise the same alarming spectre, it does highlight the need to ensure that the country's farmlands and family farm culture are given an appropriate level of protection. To do this, Canada first needs to understand the lay of the land, says Bonnett.

"We need to start collecting data about non-farmer investments because right now we don't have a lot of information," he says, noting this information gathering should be led by a federal, provincial *Continued on page 10*

Kerry Froese and his two sons at their family farm in Abbotsford, B.C. Froese believes investor involvement in agricultural land is making it harder for farming families to make succession plans and pass down farms to future generations.

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From page 7

or territorial government. “We need to collect information that tells us how many of these investments are happening, where they’re happening and what type of investments they are. Are they intended, for example, to supply capital to people who are farming, or to own the land and then rent it to farmers?”

Because of the apparent preference by investors to lease the land they own to farm managers, governments should also ensure these lease agreements provide for long-term tenure. This gives the tenant the ability to manage the farm with minimal disruptions, says Bonnett.

Given the growth in recent years of institutional investments in Canada’s farmlands, the country’s provinces and territories would also do well to review and update their land protection and ownership policies. That’s what Prince Edward Island did last year, almost immediately after it appointed Horace Carver to the role of Lands Protection Act commissioner.

The Act, which Carver helped to draft and pass more than 30 years ago, sets limits on the amount of property that can be held by an individual or corporation. Carver’s recommendations, which were published in June 2013, call for maintaining current land ownership ceilings – 1,000 acres for individuals and 3,000 acres for corporations – but eliminating certain contentious sections of the Act. These include a rule that counts land leased out to someone else towards the landowners’ maximum holdings. Non-arable lands, such as woodland and hills, would also be excluded from the maximum allowed.

Bertha Campbell, a P.E.I. farmer and provincial representative for the CFA, says the review of P.E.I.’s *Lands Protection Act* was prompted by local farmers seeking to own more land, and not by concerns about investor groups buying up farm real estate. Nonetheless, she says it’s good to have clear rules in place that regulate land ownership.

“People here are very attached to the land,” she says. “We don’t really have many non-farming investment groups buying up land in P.E.I., but that could change in the future.”

Campbell echoes Bonnett’s call for better data collection on farmland ownership. It’s one of the recommendations in Carver’s report, she points out.

“One of the ways Horace suggests to prevent land grabbing is to keep data so you’ll see if large tracts of land are being purchased or sold,” she says.

There are potential upsides to the growth of non-farming investments in agriculture. Bonnett points, for one, to more opportunities for young people without capital to enter the farming business. Without money to buy their own farm, these new entrants can rent or lease land owned by an investment group. Alternatively, the investment group could come in as a partner, with both investors and farmers putting some of their own cash on the table.

“We could start seeing different financing models to cover the capital costs of buying farmland,” says Bonnett. “The high capital cost of purchasing farmland is a barrier to entry, so we need to start thinking innovatively about how we can bring down that barrier.”

Bonnett notes that many institutional investors in agriculture today are forming partnerships with experienced farm managers, who enter into long-term leasing arrangements with the investor owners. But while this is likely a good thing for farmers, these types of opportunities may be out of reach for young farmers who don’t have a track record of successful farm management.

The sector is also seeing new investment approaches, including one pioneered by Input Capital Inc., a Regina-based agricultural streaming company that buys canola from farmers through multi-year contracts that pay the majority of the cash in advance. Input Capital’s focus is on commodities, but its business model offers an example of how innovative financing can give investors access to the agriculture sector while keeping land in farmers’ hands.

Given the many aspects of this rather complex discussion, it’s not surprising that Canada’s farming communities have not come to a definitive conclusion about the true implications of institutional investment in farmland, says Bonnett.

“I don’t think anybody can really say right now whether it’s good or bad,” he says. “But what we do know for sure is that we don’t want to see a scenario where farmland is largely owned by non-farm investors and farmers are just leasing the land.” ●



Farmer Bertha Campbell (above) says she is pleased with P.E.I.’s Lands Protection Act and its clarity of rules governing land ownership. Chicks on Kerry Froese’s family farm (below) in Abbotsford, B.C.



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Taking stock



\$1-billion+

Sales at Canadian farmers' markets in 2009, with a total economic impact of over

\$3-billion*



190

Number of countries to which Canadian food and beverage makers export their goods**

98

Percentage of Canadian farms that are family owned and operated**

6,000

Number of food and beverage manufacturing facilities in Canada**



\$26-billion

Food and beverage manufacturing industry's contribution to Canada's GDP**

#1

North America's largest greenhouse research facility is at Harrow, Ontario. ††

1-billion kilos+

Canada annual chicken production – about 638 million birds. †



44%

Rise in animal production exports to China in 2011.***

SOURCES: * FARMERS' MARKETS CANADA, THE NATIONAL FARMERS' MARKET IMPACT STUDY 2009 REPORT; ** AGRICULTURE ND AGRI-FOOD CANADA; ***TD ECONOMICS, SPECIAL REPORT: UNPRECEDENTED VOLATILITY A HALLMARK OF AGRICULTURE'S NEW AGE, NOVEMBER 3, 2011; † CHICKEN FARMERS OF CANADA; †† AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD CANADA.



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Cultivating Canada's food superpower potential

It's been called "recession proof" and is Canada's strongest manufacturing segment in terms of production value and number of employees. Yet Canada's food and beverage manufacturing sector faces challenges that have resulted in declining employment and slower growth. Proponents say we can do better.

By Susanne Martin

With almost 300,000 employees, the country's food and beverage manufacturers transform raw ingredients into commercial food products – buying over 35 per cent of what Canadian farmers and ranchers produce and support hundreds of thousands of indirect jobs, for instance in retail, food service, marketing and packaging.

Last but not least, the sector creates food security for Canadians, says Derek Nighbor, senior vice president of Food & Consumer Products of Canada (FCPC), who adds that the potential for increased levels of food production is considerable. "If you look at the arable land, the fresh water and the skills of our workforce, we should be a major exporter. We should be a food superpower."

Yet we aren't – so what's the missing link?

A recent industry study commissioned by Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters and FCPC offers insight. The 2014 Management Issues Survey

revealed a number of challenges food and beverage manufacturers face, including a fluctuating dollar, rising input costs, an outdated regulatory system, retail consolidation and changing consumer preferences. Survey respondents also felt that governments were restricting their ability to grow.

“We see this as a call to action for all levels of government to better understand the industry and think about policy that supports growth,” says Nighbor, adding there is a role for government to implement measures that keep taxes and regulatory compliance costs low and open new markets. He also notes that improved policy could help create reliable and cost-effective infrastructure and support innovation.

At the federal level, Nighbor says barriers include labelling regulations and approval times for new foods. “It can take three to four years to get a product approved in Canada versus a shorter period in the U.S. or other countries – that doesn’t send the right signal to the investment community,” he explains, adding that while recent positive action from the government has led to an improved regulatory system, there is still much room for improvement.

Findings of a recent study by the Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute (CAPI) confirm the challenges identified by food and beverage manufacturers. In addition, they point to the importance of scale and market access, says David McInnes, CAPI’s president and CEO.

“Access to markets can be a big part of achieving appropriate scale,” McInnes explains. “But the issue is how Canadian companies can define a differentiation advantage as a platform to achieve suitable scale in the right markets.”

And while an enabling economic environment – such as trade agreements, a competitive corporate tax structure and tax credits for innovation – has a positive influence, the study also notes that people and talent are instrumental to a company’s success. Considerations include a highly effective CEO with an absolute clarity of vision of what a company wants to achieve, and what McInnes calls the “pursuit of differentiation.”

“Being innovative goes beyond new products or processes – it’s a way to assert your competitiveness on every level, from the sourcing of quality ingredients to locking in strategic partnerships,” he explains. “This drive to differentiate is at the heart of the winning formula.”

At Ozery’s Pita Break, innovation is a constant process, says Alon Ozery, who, together with his brother Guy, owns and operates the Ontario bakery that has risen from a small family business to a commercial bakery that now supplies retailers across North America.

“There is a lot of movement in food manufacturing that is often the result of consumer perception,” he says. “The flavour of the month could be anything from fibre or fat, to certain berries – we see a lot of demand for new products.”

Ozery’s Pita Break has been able to respond to changing market demands, demonstrating a nimbleness that has facilitated its considerable growth, says Ozery. It also helps that his business pays close attention to shifting consumer preferences.

For example, growing demand for “better-for-you” options are setting off chain reactions with retailers asking manufacturers to step up production of certain products.

Yet, sometimes despite a timely response, challenges can still arise when producers are unable to secure sufficient supplies of in-demand ingredients, as a current shortage of some organic ingredients illustrates, says Ozery.

He has also noticed a gap between what’s happening in the market and how quickly regulators react.

“There needs to be a system for responding to consumers’ appetites not only for new products but also for information on how they’re produced, and what is or isn’t in them,” Ozery explains, adding that co-ordination between trade partners – such as Canada and the U.S. – can also help level the playing field.

“Being innovative goes beyond new products or processes – it’s a way to assert your competitiveness on every level, from the sourcing of quality ingredients to locking in strategic partnerships.”

David McInnes, president and CEO, Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute

Nighbor predicts that domestic growth will primarily happen in niche markets – for instance ethnic foods and the health and wellness space – while bigger expansion opportunities lie in international markets.

Doing business beyond Canada’s borders has become familiar territory for Bill Thomas of Thomas’ Utopia Brand, a tomato-processing company in Ontario that sells products under the Utopia label and private labels. In 2011, Thomas’ Utopia expanded its market reach into China.

What Chinese consumers are looking for is safe food, Thomas explains, and Canada’s image of having a clean environment and high safety standards has helped build a customer base in a country struggling with internal food quality concerns.

Gaining access to new markets is important for the company’s strategy. “When you’re operating in a country of 35 million and you’re catering to a niche market, your customer base is limited,” says Thomas.

Being able to adapt has always been important for the family business that was established in 1933. Since Canada’s



In order to stay competitive, Thomas' Utopia has needed to expand its market reach, says Bill Thomas (above). The company has also been able to attract government support such as the Provincial Red Grant, announced last spring. Innovation is ongoing at Ozery's Pita Break, says Alon Ozery (below). In addition to sourcing ingredients locally as much as possible, the company's equipment has been custom-built in Ontario.



potential

area for growing processing tomatoes is small in comparison to California or Europe, volumes are lower and production costs are higher. When working in a consolidated retail market where pricing is highly competitive, Thomas says a company either had to be extremely efficient or look for something that sets it apart.

"That 'something' can give you a better margin and allow you to grow your business," notes Thomas. With that in mind, Thomas' Utopia started an organic line 15 years ago that helped secure a market niche in Canada and certain areas in the U.S.

Yet Thomas still advocates for setting his company's "sights a little wider." As part of its growth strategy, the firm is currently establishing a presence on the African continent, specifically in Nigeria.

While the opportunity is clear, identifying reliable partners and accessing funding are among the hurdles.

"If you're talking to Canadian banks about funding for exports to Africa, they're pretty much closing the door before you finish your sentence," Thomas says, adding that this often leaves companies to find private investors or government funding.

"There are government programs that recognize that to grow industry and the economy, we need to look at how we sit on the world stage," he adds.

Nighbor agrees, "We are a smaller country with higher costs. To compete on the global scale, we need appropriate support from governments." He also cautions, however, that while Canada's less responsive regulatory framework is seen as a barrier to innovation, it is to the manufacturers' advantage to retain the country's reputation for having one of the world's safest food systems.

McInnes welcomes a growing awareness about the importance of the sector, which he notes surpasses both Canada's mighty aerospace and auto industries in terms of GDP contributions and jobs. This makes the need even more compelling to address Canada's processed foods trade deficit, which has ballooned from about \$1-billion in 2004 to \$6.8-billion in 2014.

"Increasing exports, adding value to our agricultural ingredients and meeting consumer food expectations requires an integrated approach. There is a role for companies and their supply chains on one side and government and others that enable success on the other," he says. "We need to maximize these connections to become a global powerhouse for manufactured food." ●



Making the connection to enhanced productivity

What will it take to fully realize Canada's food production potential?

A recent study by the Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute looked at the strengths and barriers of the country's food and beverage manufacturing sector with a view to improve its chances for success. One recommendation coming from the findings was that companies forge stronger connections within their supply chains as well as with governments and other enabling organizations. The question is how to do it efficiently.

Technology may provide an answer. Kal Ghadban and Chris Halkai, partners at Ottawa-based business analytics and Enterprise Resource Planning company BNuvola, say today's software can help forge bonds and expand market intelligence.

They say their sophisticated solutions powered by Qlik and SAP software applications can utilize data to improve outcomes all along the way, from farm to table, says Ghadban, by creating feedback loops that let manufacturers and farmers know what's happening in the market.

"Technology can be a powerful tool for connecting food producers with manufacturers, retailers and other partners," says Halkai, adding that creating a community can also boost the potential for all involved.

Food for thought.

-Susanne Martin

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Food growers, manufacturers, take a bite out of hunger

By Ian MacNeill

Despite Canada's vast wealth, each month close to 900,000 Canadians seek assistance from food banks across the country. While the need is staggering, behind the scenes, Canadian agri-food organizations are standing tall when it comes to helping address hunger issues in Canada.

According to Food Banks Canada executive director Katharine Schmidt, last year



Katharine Schmidt of Food Banks Canada

alone Canadian corporations – many from the agri-food sector – donated 20 million pounds of food valued at an estimated \$45-million. She points to a long standing relationship between Food Banks Canada and New Brunswick-based McCain Foods among the sterling examples.

“In the past six years, McCain has donated eight million pounds of food and provided \$400,000 in financial support,” she says. “We could not do what we do across the country, both at the national and local level, without support like this.”

Joanne deVisser, senior manager, digital strategy for McCain, says contributing to the cause of alleviating hunger just makes sense to a company like McCain. “We’re a food company so we understand the importance of it to Canadian families,” she commented, adding that the company plans to do still more in the years ahead.

“In 2009 we formalized our relationship with Food Banks Canada to help raise awareness of hunger and we’re planning to take the relationship to a whole new level with our Share Something Good campaign,” she says, explaining that in addition to donating a million dollars’ worth of food and financial support over the next year alone, the campaign will challenge all Canadians to help feed families in need.

Other corporate and agri-business donors have also been generous, acknowledges Schmidt. For example, Unilever, Nestle Canada and Campbell Company of Canada are among many major contributors while PepsiCo Foods Canada, Kraft Canada, and Ferrero Canada add to their support through executives who serve as volunteer board members.

On the agricultural side, organizations including the Turkey Farmers of Canada, Chicken Farmers of Canada, and the Egg Farmers of Canada also make a big difference.

“We know that one in seven children in Canada goes to school hungry,” says Lyne Robichaud, public affairs officer for Egg Farmers of Canada. “This is a very troubling statistic for our farmers, who see it as a part of their duty to provide wholesome food to Canadian tables.”

To address the problem, Egg Farmers has entered a three-year partnership with Breakfast Club Canada, which serves up as many as 21 million breakfasts in schools across the country annually. The contribution will include \$200,000 in financial support as well as a significant number of fresh eggs.

“This partnership is rooted in our promise to promote healthy living in Canadian communities. Every child deserves a complete breakfast before school,” says Ms. Robichaud.

deVisser adds, “When everyone helps the food banks we all benefit.” ●



In Bangladesh, a food security initiative takes root

As part of its Good Growth Plan, Syngenta has dispatched 15 members of the company’s international staff to Bangladesh, where they are working to improve the livelihoods of rice and potato farmers.

While nearly 60 per cent of Bangladesh land is used for farming, agricultural capacity is low. Estimates show that 25 million people in Bangladesh lack access to safe drinking water and about 40 per cent of children under the age of five are chronically malnourished.

The Syngenta initiative is focused on helping farmers who cultivate potatoes and rice crops on less than a hectare of land to sustainably improve their economic and food security.

Working with independent development organization Voluntary Service Overseas, as well as local community leaders in nine communities in northwestern Bangladesh, Syngenta employees set out on a 30-day mission this fall to lay the groundwork for a long-term strategy.

Reporting from Bangladesh shortly after his arrival, Syngenta Canada staffer Nathan Klages said, “There’s going to be a lot packed into this first phase of the project, but hopefully by the time we leave, we can be confident that we have the full support of the farmers and communities to carry this work forward.”

Follow this story, and learn more about the ways Canadian agri-food organizations are helping alleviate hunger abroad, at farmtotablemagazine.ca.

-Randall Mang

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Tilapia's rapid growth and natural disease resistance makes the species well suited to Aquaponic farming.

Aquaponics

Closing the loop on sustainability

By Christopher Pollon

Beginning next May, visitors to Michelle and Jim

Lester's Newfoundland farm will be able to buy fish and produce grown together in an "aquaponic" closed-loop system that reuses waste and water.

"Aquaponics is basically a recycling system that replicates nature," says Michelle of the 11,000-square-foot system now being built on the couple's agro-tourism farm located just inside St. John's city limits. The fish provide nutrients for the plants, the plants take up the nutrients, and by doing so, the water is cleansed of ammonia and nitrate, allowing for the nutrient- and beneficial bacteria-rich water to be perpetually looped. "It is the most environmentally friendly way of growing food."

Michelle was inspired to take up aquaponics after discovering the farming practice on the Internet – and reading about farms in the Middle East and Australia where the practice is already established. Not only were the Lesters able to attract support from three levels of government to create a pilot project at their farm, they tapped the expertise of Memorial

University-affiliated experts in St. John's (see sidebar).

While carp, catfish and barramundi can adapt well to aquaponic systems, the choice was made to raise tilapia (a warm freshwater fish native to Africa) because the species grows quickly and is naturally disease-resistant. In the first year alone, the Lesters expect to produce about 6,800 kg (15,000 pounds) of tilapia – which will be sold directly to visitors to the farm.

It's fitting that the facility, which will be just the sec-

ond commercial aquaponics operation in Canada by next May, will be in Newfoundland – an island lovingly known by locals as "the rock" due to its predominantly stony, unarable land. The aquaponic produce will not require soil at all. Instead, the plants will suck nutrients from recirculated fish water that would otherwise be disposed.

"Replicating a completely natural biological system means I can sell these products to my customers and give them 110 per cent assurance that it is a pure product," says Michelle. ●

What is Aquaponics?

A relatively new field of agriculture, aquaponics is set for huge growth worldwide according to Wasiim Kader Bathia, a Memorial University MSc grad and aquaponics expert who has overseen the design and engineering of the Lester's system. The benefits are obvious, he says. Traditional aquaculture requires the discard of 10 per cent of polluted water a day, while aquaponics discards zero waste, losing less than 1.5 per cent per day (mostly from evaporation). Aquaponics can be established virtually anywhere, and compared to field production or hydroponics, the yield is much higher, in part because the perfect nutrients are always in contact with the roots.

It doesn't hurt that vegetables fed such naturally occurring nutrients – instead of synthetic chemical fertilizers – will taste much better, too. "It's the most natural way of producing food," he says.

The challenge is clear. Our global population, now more than seven billion, will rise to more than nine billion by 2050. That's 200,000 more people to feed every day. Yet, there's no more land for agriculture, and fresh water is becoming scarce.



Syngenta has launched The Good Growth Plan, agriculture's most ambitious and comprehensive program to help sustainably address the global food security challenge. Through the Good Growth Plan, we are committed to more food, less waste, more biodiversity, less degradation and more health, less poverty.



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