

# Quebec Farmers' Advocate

## January 2008

### QFA EDITORIAL

*The following editorial is the third of a seven-part series of commentaries by QFA Vice-president Chris Judd, entitled "The Seven Bank Accounts of a Farmer." It's not only money that makes a successful agricultural operation, says Judd, but also education, seed, soil, family, neighbours and politics, which make up any farm's healthy "bank accounts." In this instalment, Chris explains what might be the most important characteristic of any innovative producer—farm knowledge and developing a thirst for learning.*

### **The Seven Bank Accounts of a Farmer — # 3: Knowledge**

**Chris Judd**  
**QFA Vice-president**

As a teenage farm boy starting high school in the early sixties, school—and all the work that went with it—had a hard time competing with the fun of farming. To a kid just starting out, working with animals, driving machinery and fixing things that break can all be very gratifying stuff. Going to a farm machinery show in March was a no-brainer compared to reviewing schoolwork for our annual March tests. Given the choice, I went with the machinery show every time.

My first real thirst for more education came following a presentation to eighth graders at school by an "extension worker" from some college. That extension worker didn't mince words: he told us straight up that the average college graduate made a million dollars more in their working life than a high school drop out. I don't remember another thing he said. But to a farm kid in the early sixties, the promise of a million dollars was something I would not soon forget.

After that day even history class took on a whole new meaning. When I aced a physics aptitude test, my guidance counsellor even tried to steer me into engineering. I was sold on the idea of getting a little more education—but in farming, not engineering. It only took one more visit from the extension professor from Macdonald College to make up my mind. After my Christmas break during grade 11, I applied to Mac.

Even after I had started at Mac, I figured my education would be complete once I was handed my diploma from "that noble institution." My dad always said a piece of paper isn't hard to carry compared to bales of hay or forking out a box stall.

Little did I know that the most important thing you can learn is the hunger to learn more. Any forward-looking producer who plans on making his or her farm last for generations will never tire in the quest to gain more knowledge. Ministry of Environment inspectors may not approve of the way we were taught to feed cows, grow crops and manage manure in the sixties (Mac professors said it was cheaper to push the manure over the bank and use chemical fertilizer!), but today's production methods are a far cry from what they were 40 years ago. Some farmers become innovators while others are left in the dust.

Keeping up on the newest developments in feeding technology can give you an edge when trying to decide whether that feed salesman is selling you "foo-foo powder" or is actually light years ahead of the crowd. In the same way, following innovation in agriculture can let you know if your fertilizer rep is making your bottom line his number one priority, or if he's just thinking about his wallet.

Continuing your education may cost money at first, but with more knowledge comes more ways to save dollars and cents. Learning how to save a cow from being culled too early, or how to save ten cents per cow per day on feeding costs, can be a huge boost to any farming operation. And apart from the very profitable payback, a professional development trip at a "Managing for Profit" seminar for a few days in February, or a technology trip to Brazil or California for ten days in March, can come as a nice break. Often you'll learn more over a friendly drink with your peers than at the seminar. The contacts and resource people you're able to meet can be with you for life.

One of the most interesting—and necessary—subjects that our family has been exposed to was a session in philosophy, the science of how your partners think and why. One of the biggest challenges in farming today is managing and getting along with other people. And the list of people that the average producer must learn to work well with is long: mom, dad, son, brother, sister, your partner or employee, the vet, the nutritionist, the crop specialist, the environment inspector, the milk truck driver, your banker, your accountant—the list goes on and on and on.

There are lots of specialists out there available to help you; it's up to you to know whose help you need. In farming life, you have to keep yourself and your successor up to date on everything—and make sure that the learning never stops.

## **Producers call for government intervention in livestock crisis**

**Andrew McClelland**  
**Advocate Staff Reporter**

Canada's agricultural producers are starting 2008 with a loud and clear demand to the federal government: do something about the crisis facing the nation's livestock industry or there soon won't be any industry left.

In the past year, The Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA) has voiced its concern many times over the key issues that have left Canada's livestock industry ailing. Rising production costs, the adverse effects of the strong Canadian dollar, dwindling profits and market prices, and loss of domestic processing capacity have combined to leave producers wondering about the future of their livelihood. Add that list of difficulties to those caused by the 2003 BSE crisis and it's easy to see why Canadian farmers are demanding that Ottawa do more for agriculture.

"We have seen some action at the provincial level, so the federal government now needs to show some leadership and step up to the plate," said CFA President Bob Friesen. "All the announcements made to date have dealt with program money already announced and committed. They have not addressed the solutions being recommended by the industry."

Action at the provincial level hasn't been quick either, but many provinces have taken the initiative needed to help their hog and beef farmers in particular. The Ontario government announced in mid-December that it would inject \$150 million into the province's agriculture "to strengthen competitiveness," with \$100 million going directly to cattle and hog producers. Industry professionals estimate that Ontario beef producers collectively lost \$100 million dollars in the last six months of 2007.

Provincial help also came lately for the Saskatchewan pork industry. Hog farmers across Canada have been particularly hard hit in recent years. With high fuel costs, climbing prices for feed such as barley, and the growing demands on ethanol production, many believe that Canada's pork infrastructure could be on the brink of collapse.

"Without exaggeration, I can say we are on the verge of losing our pork industry, which has become a backbone of the Canadian agricultural export economy and to the entire Canadian economy," said Bob Friesen. Similarly, Saskatchewan Minister of Agriculture Bob Bjornerud commented that help for his province's pork producers is "desperately needed."

Hog farmers in Saskatchewan can now apply for a provincial "Short-Term Hog Loan Program" and federally administered relief money through the newly created AgriStability program.

But many farmers are saying that such ad hoc payments are band-aid solutions that won't last. Many in the hog industry feel that packing plants and processors are exploiting farmers by paying too little for their meat and making an unfair profit.

Here in Quebec, the pork industry is up against what it is calling the worst crisis in its history. Falling prices have hurt the industry at every level while slaughtering facilities can't keep up with production (as of December 2007, 44,000 hogs were waiting to be slaughtered in the province). Meanwhile, Jean-Guy Vincent, president of the *Fédération des producteurs de porcs du Québec* has officially called on Quebec Minister of Agriculture Laurent Lessard to intervene and solve the crisis in the pork sector.

The Canadian Federation of Agriculture and other industry representatives say that they want a new loan program that will help farmers in all areas of livestock production to be protected from the whims of the global economy. That means cash payments that come quickly, reliably with extra help from all levels of government.

"This is not a permanent crisis," says Friesen. "Those producers just need a hand to overcome this immediate convergence of roadblocks and they will be able to get back to making their major contribution to our economy."

## **Liberals and Conservatives in a battle for the rural vote**

**Barry Wilson**  
**Special to the Advocate**

Cindy Duncan McMillan, West Quebec beef producer, was her usual optimistic self.

The former Quebec Farmers' Association president and Liberal candidate in Pontiac riding in the next election had just been appointed advisor on Quebec agricultural issues to Liberal leader Stéphane Dion in early December.

Dion, Montreal academic, year-long federal Liberal leader and ten-year veteran of Liberal cabinets and Quebec politics, is the first to admit he doesn't have an instinctive understanding of agricultural issues, she said.

"Now, the professor is a student," said Duncan McMillan. "He really wants to know more about the agriculture file."

Along with Prince Edward Island MP and parliamentary agriculture critic Wayne Easter, she was asked by the leader to devise policies that "address the current challenges facing Canadian farmers."

As an articulate, politically astute, experienced hands-on farmer, Duncan McMillan is a fine choice to advise Dion on farm issues. In his previous professional life and his political life as a Montreal MP with responsibility for federal-provincial relations and

then the environment, it's understandable that agriculture isn't exactly an active file in his memory bank.

Since being elected leader, Dion has been coached to say the appropriate things—supply management is good, the Canadian Wheat Board monopoly is good, the Conservatives are heartless right wing ideologues opposed to helping farmers despite their lock on most farmer-influenced seats.

But Dion has never given the slightest indication that he understood anything behind the words he had been asked to mouth. Questions have led only to banalities about the importance of farmer collective marketing power and the Conservatives' American-inspired attack on farmer power in favour of corporations.

So Dion is wise to seek help and smart in his choice of Duncan McMillan for advice.

However, politicians are not astute at measuring the strength of their political enemies so Dion likely will hear a version of this from his new Quebec agriculture advisor—the Conservatives are suspect on supporting supply management because they oppose the Canadian Wheat Board single desk, are unpopular because of their tepid support for the ailing hog industry and generally are held in suspicion because of their right wing anti-government ideology.

This likely is what Duncan McMillan is hearing from her farm supporters.

What Dion and the Liberals will face in rural Quebec is somewhat different.

The Harper Conservatives have set aside their traditional antipathy toward collectivist marketing boards and state support for beleaguered industries. They have been arguably more militant in their support of supply management protectionism at World Trade Organization talks than were the Liberals, despite strong Liberal credentials on the file.

Conservatives have made it clear that redesigned farm safety nets still will send billions to farmers, even if their first attempt at aid to hog producers this winter drew only lukewarm responses from the industry.

And unlike more than ten years of Liberal inaction on the file, the Conservatives have moved to create new WTO-sanctioned import restrictions on dairy substitutes and braved the fierce opposition of Canada's business establishment to impose new standards on cheese making that force processors to use more Canadian milk. Dairy farmers are thrilled.

This is not to say that Conservatives are not vulnerable in rural Quebec on other issues.

It is to say Dion should understand that on agricultural issues, the Conservatives have left the Liberals little room to proclaim Conservative betrayal.

And he should remember that those rural votes he craves have traditionally been conservative votes, supporters of the *Creditistes* and the *Union Nationale* except during the Pierre Trudeau era and finally moving to the *Bloc Québécois* as the only alternative to the urban-centric Liberals.

These rural voters are not natural Liberals no matter what his advisors tell him.

Barry Wilson grew up on a West Quebec farm and has spent more than a quarter century covering agricultural, rural and trade issues on Parliament Hill as National Correspondent for The Western Producer newspaper.

## **A new Director of Operations for QFA!**

**Andrew McClelland**  
**Advocate Staff Reporter**

The Quebec Farmers' Association (QFA) has started the New Year with a change in personnel—Wendy Jones will be taking over from Pamela Ledoux as the QFA's Director of Operations as of January 2008!

Wendy, who recently graduated from Concordia University's professional journalism program, grew up on a farm in Sutton, QC. Currently enrolled in the animal production technology program at the *Institut de technologie agroalimentaire* in Saint-Hyacinthe, she joins the QFA with a thorough knowledge of farm life. And if that's not impressive enough, Wendy is not only fluently bilingual in Canada's official languages, but trilingual: she learned German from her mother, who grew up Switzerland.

"I'm always excited about meeting new people, and this job will allow me a lot of opportunity for that," said Wendy. "Although Pam leaves pretty big shoes to fill, I'm really looking forward to be able to work in the agricultural community."

Ivan Hale, responsible for hiring as the QFA's Executive Director, was impressed with Wendy's shining credentials and enthusiastic attitude.

"Wendy comes from a farm background and is deeply interested in pursuing her lifelong interest in agriculture," said Hale. "She is working at QFA part-time while continuing her studies and working part-time on a horse farm near her home. Like many other farmers, she is juggling many balls in order to pursue her passion for agriculture. We're as excited as she is to have Wendy join the QFA team."

It is with a heavy heart that the QFA says goodbye to former Director of Operations Pamela Ledoux. Since joining the QFA in the spring of 2005, Pamela has been the "go-to gal" for association members wanting to know just about anything concerning the QFA's

activities—be it renewing their Advocate subscription, donating to the Warren Grapes fund, or finding the QFA’s office in the *Union des producteurs agricoles* building!

“We always knew Pam was a treasure and that she would go far in life,” says Hale. “During the time she worked at QFA she learned a lot, and made a major contribution to our association, for which we’re all very grateful. We wish her all the best in the future.”

Pamela was hired as a Production Co-ordinator at Softitler, a Montreal-based company that specializes in adding subtitles for movies and DVDs. Pam will be overseeing the subtitles for a variety of movies and television programs made by Disney.

"My three years at the QFA were incredibly enriching for me, on both a professional and a personal level," says Pam. "I am very grateful for the opportunities that it brought me and I look forward to keeping in touch!"

From everyone at the QFA: good luck, Pam! And welcome aboard, Wendy!

## **The devil is in the details when you’re in the dairy barn**

**Paul Meldrum**  
**Dairy Supervisor**  
**Macdonald Campus Farm**

Nowhere does the old saying “the devil is in the details” have more relevance than in managing dairy cattle. Be it in calf raising, feeding dry and lactating cows and making breeding decisions, attention to detail often means the difference between mediocrity and excellence. And so it is with how you milk your cows. It is consistently doing the little things that will determine udder health and the quality of your milk. Over the next few issues, I will look at the various aspects that contribute to top quality milk, including equipment maintenance, and the potential of financial incentives. Today I will discuss milking routine, and I can boil it down to one word - cleanliness.

Everything should be clean: the cows, the bedding, the milking equipment and the person doing the milking. If things are clean, you have fewer opportunities for bacteria to enter the mammary system, causing mastitis or at the very least raising somatic cell counts, and less chance of bacteria getting into the pipeline and bulk tank, raising your bacteria count.

Let’s start with the cows. Bedding that is free of manure is a must, and here is one of those details—frequent scraping of the stalls to keep manure away from the udder, and sprucing up of bedding so there is something other than a mattress or cement under the cow. In a tie barn that means passing behind the cows frequently.

The use of trainers and tail ties is also helpful. In a free-stall set up, it means stall maintenance at every milking and frequent passes of the alley scraper. In our barn the

rule is, if you see manure under a cow, take the time to remove it, no matter if you're headed out to the field, to the feed room or out the door for lunch. Having clean cows reduces the time it takes to milk and makes the job a lot more pleasant. It ties in with what I call the three "C" rule for milking: clean udders, a clean milking machine and clean hands on the person doing the milking.

Clean udders is more than a lack of manure, it is proper disinfection of teats and teat ends either with an udder wash or a pre-dip, followed by a single use paper or cloth towel. It is easy to get into the habit of washing the teats without actually examining them to ensure they are free of debris. Using the same cloth rag to wash cows is a definite no-no because it is nothing but a mastitis maker, a practice that, like milk cans, should just be a part of dairy history. If you do use udder wash, it is equally important to dry the teats before attaching the milker. Water droplets hanging from the end of a teat can be forced into the teat canal if the milking machine is attached without pinching the inflation to cut off the "vacuum shock." The same can happen with a piece of bedding that you missed during the udder prep. Normally it takes 30 to 60 seconds for the cow to let down her milk after you have stimulated her udder with proper preparation. Attaching milkers too early means your machines are squeezing the teats when there is nothing in them, with the potential to damage the interior of the teat and the teat end. It is the same story with leaving the milking unit on too long. That's why automatic take-offs do such a nice job—they are consistent and will come off if you're busy with another cow.

Once the unit is off, the teats should be dipped immediately. It is preferable for the cow to remain standing for about 20 minutes after milking to allow the teat ends a chance to close. The best reason for a cow to stand is to have feed in front of her, and normally they have a keen appetite right after milking. In free-stall operations, it is a common routine to have fresh feed in the bunk as the cows exit the parlour. In a tie-barn, it can actually be a nuisance if the old feed is being removed and the new ration is being fed at the same time as milking, as the cows will move around in their stalls and knock units off as they will be more focused on eating than on giving milk. But there should at least be feed in front of the cows and it should be pushed up just prior to milking. Some producers like to feed a little hay just before milking.

Still with the clean theme, milking machines must come out of the milk house spotless, both inside and out. It requires that a proper job be done in the milk house at the end of chores, ready to start the next milking. If during chores a milking machine becomes dirty, it should be cleaned before attaching it to the next cow. In a tie barn, it may mean taking the unit back to the milk house or keeping a pail of piping hot sanitized water on your cart. Care should be taken that this does not become a cesspool of bacteria—change it often if you have to. In the parlour, units should be hosed off if they get dirty, and all manure should be removed from the floor area under the udders before the next group of cows comes in. You might argue that all of this slows up the milking procedure, but it takes a lot less time to prevent mastitis than it does to treat it. And it costs a lot less.

As for the third "C", clean hands are probably the easiest part of the process. Whether you use nitril or latex gloves or bare hands, they should always be clean before touching

udders or teat ends. You can use the udder wash, the hose in the parlour, the sink in the milk house or change gloves if you have to. Milking is one of the most important jobs on a dairy farm, so proper technique and routine is absolutely crucial. Remember, the devil is in the details—take care of those details and keep the devil out of your barn.

*Paul Meldrum is Dairy Supervisor at McGill University's Macdonald Campus Farm. In the past, he has run successful dairy operations in both Ontario and New York State, hosted and produced CJOH TV's "Valley Farmer," and has been heard on agriculture reports for CBC Radio Noon in Ottawa.*

## Changes to vaccination protocol at specialized auctions

**Eve Martin**  
**FPBQ**

At the annual general meeting of the *Fédération des producteurs de bovins du Québec* last April, feeder-calf producers adopted a new vaccination protocol.

The new protocol will be applicable to feeder calves marketed at specialized auctions as of January 1, 2008. With these changes, Quebec continues to lead the rest of the country in feeder-calf vaccination.

	<i>Dead Vaccine</i> <b>IBR PI<sub>3</sub> BRSV BVD</b>	<i>Attenuated Live Vaccine</i> <b>IBR PI<sub>3</sub> BRSV BVD</b>
<b>Booster required</b>	<i>Yes</i> <i>(from two to four weeks after first vaccination)</i>	<i>No</i>
<b>Calf age</b>	<i>four months and older</i>	<i>four months and older</i>
<b>Required interval</b>	<i>two weeks before sale</i> <i>(for booster)</i>	<i>two weeks before sale</i>

The following documents must accompany the calves at specialized auction sales:

- *2008 vaccination certificate, filled out and signed*
- *Proof of purchase of vaccines used*

*To check that producers have respected the protocol, veterinarians will take blood samples at specialized auctions, and then follow up with producers.*

If you have any questions or need further information don't hesitate to contact Eve Martin at 450-679-0540, ext. 8891.

# Verified Beef Production: the Canadian on-farm food safety program

**Nathalie Côté**  
**FPBQ**

*Food safety has become a major factor for any shopper trying to decide what to buy in the supermarket. Proper food safety starts on the farm, and the Verified Beef Production program is designed to address consumers who are concerned with food production methods.*

## **What is the Verified Beef Production program (VBP)**

VBP is a producer-led program designed to help implement and verify good production practices on the farm that minimize food safety risk. The program fundamentals are based on three key areas:

- **Good Production Practices (GPPs):**  
These management practices cover animal health management, cattle receiving and shipping, cattle feeding, pesticide control and training.
- **Effective records:**  
Documenting food safety management practices serve as a proof that withdrawal times are followed and potential hazards are minimized.
- **Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs):**  
Applying GPPs in a consistent manner in order to prove what is being done.

## **Why is the VBP program worth my time?**

The VBP program is about more than just on-farm food safety. It's about bringing Canada's beef operations in line with new marketplace expectations, to support the success of producers and the beef industry both today and in the future. Canada's beef producers are already highly esteemed for acting responsibly, but VBP will heighten their reputation even further.

By providing the latest knowledge to assess and improve on-farm food safety, the program helps producers keep up to date with best practices. These are designed to not only ensure on-farm food safety but to also support improved efficiency and profitability.

## **To get involved in the program.**

The VBP program is completely voluntary. While it takes effort to be done properly, the process is not difficult.

**Step 1:** Attend a VBP workshop. This course provides a complete overview of the program.

**Step 2:** Implement the SOPs at your farm. Some producer will choose to simply implement the SOPs, others will move to the next step—a registration audit.

**Step 3:** Apply to become a registered beef operation.

## **When is the next workshop?**

The next VBP workshop will be held in French on Monday, February 4 at MAPAQ Buckingham, and in English on Tuesday, February 5 at Heritage Hall in Low. Both workshops will take place between 7:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m.

For more information or to arrange a workshop in your area call Nathalie Côté at 450-679-0530 or [ncote@upa.qc.ca](mailto:ncote@upa.qc.ca). Workshops are offered at no cost. Some partial funding is available from the Canadian Food Safety and Quality Program for approved equipment and software to all producers attending a workshop.

## **A season-by-season list for a successful farm transfer**

**Vincent McConnell, agronome**

**Jocelyne Jourdain, agronome**

Discuss, make a plan, determine your sources of finance, evaluate the fiscal and legal aspects, persevere and carry on—then if necessary, start over again! However, all your efforts could be in vain if you merely repeat your mistakes and hope for a different outcome.

So here is a list of things to do in order to accomplish what might seem like the impossible: a successful transfer or start-up of a farm enterprise.

Start off the New Year by talking with your children, your parents and those dear to you, listening to what they have to say about their vision of an ideal farm transfer project (for example, continue as is, change certain elements, expand the business, improve it or sell it). Listening does not necessarily mean arguing. In most cases, this is best left to others (for instance, it may be preferable to have a competent advisor tell you what is possible and what is not). In the end, the more ideas you have, the easier it will be to prepare your farm succession plan.

The family that has the best chance for a successful farm transfer is one where all family members understand and respect the ideas and objectives of the others, both on a business level and on a personal level. Ideally, they will even try to help each other attain these objectives. If necessary, an outside third party may be called in to facilitate dialogue and communication.

Once your various options have been considered, it is time to draw up a transfer plan. If you have not already done so, it is also an opportunity to bring in good advisors who can help you advance your plan throughout the year (combining IQs can be very effective!). At the very least, the following resource-people should be involved: someone to oversee and support the family throughout the process, a financial advisor, an accountant or tax specialist and a notary. The MAPAQ farm succession and establishment advisor can be a valuable resource person, by introducing you to other useful specialists, such as the

Outaouais Advisory Services Network, the *Groupe conseil agricole de l'Outaouais*, the UPA, the *Financière agricole du Québec* and other private consultants. By being aware of the various resources available, who can be potentially useful to your project, you may then call upon any of these experienced advisors to help prepare your succession plan and ultimately to complete the farm transfer.

Here's a suggestion: arrange for a preliminary meeting (or do it by phone) with each of the chosen advisors about one month before finalizing your farm succession plan. That way, they can review it and give you a list of the various documents you will need (and the decisions you will have to make during the transfer process) in order to avoid surprises and delays.

## Teaching agriculture as early as pre-school

Hens do not have teeth and they do not eat carrots. What may seem self-evident to us may not be common knowledge to young children. That's why a group of students from Laval University's Faculty of Agriculture and Food Science (FSAA) have developed a new project that tries to demystify agriculture for kids.

The idea originated in the minds of Eloise Gagnon and Marie-Eve Cardinal about five years ago. The two young women recruited some of their fellow classmates and started to invent games to help children become familiar with Quebec's agri-food activities and to promote agriculture at the same time.

The 2004 *Salon de l'agriculture, de l'alimentation et de la consommation (SCAC)* was their first official public event for the project. The following spring, Cardinal and Gagnon inaugurated "*Agriteliers*" (agri-workshops), when they visited their first schools.

The activity is aimed at children attending pre-school, kindergarten and elementary schools. "Children today do not have any contact with agriculture. It's become even more important to open their eyes and arouse their curiosity," says Marie-Michelle Gamache, *Agritelier's* current coordinator. "Kids eat every day without knowing where their food comes from. Even many parents don't know. We explain that bread comes from wheat and bacon comes from pork," adds Marie-Christine Coulombe, *Agritelier's* communications officer. These two young women also count on the support of Cindy Lysight, a student studying pre-school education and Myriam Coulombe and Véronique Labonté, both students in agronomy. This dynamic team also recruits other monitors from the classrooms of the Laval's FSAA.

### Learning while having fun

In just one hour, *Agritelier* is able to present a realistic picture of agriculture, much more complete than the "Old Macdonald had a farm" image. "We show that farming today is much more than two cows and a few chickens," laughs Marie-Michelle. She explains that

children can play with little animal figures, with samples of animal feed, a cow's tooth and even a milking machine. "Miniature tractors and farm equipment are particularly popular with the boys," she adds. The workshops also include some teaching games, such as "Animals and Food" and "The Milk Trail," a jigsaw puzzle that allows kids to discover all the steps in the fabrication of milk beverages, right from the farm to putting it into containers.

*"The Vegetable Game", on the other hand, allows very young children to learn the difference between a fruit and a vegetable and to recognize those produced in Quebec. A story called "The Perfect Planet" illustrates the importance of agriculture and what would happen if it disappeared. But the most popular exercise for the children is the arrival of real little piglets. Exclamations of "yuck," "ugh" and "peew" give way to cries of amazement. "Often, the whole school comes down to see the piglets," attests Marie-Christine. Also, the fertile imaginations of children sometimes give rise to some comical questions. "We have been asked why there is no daddy cow on the farm with the mommy cow," relates Marie-Christine. She was able to talk herself out of that corner, by explaining a bit about artificial insemination without going into too much detail!*

The *Agritelier* workers appreciate their contact with the children and take pleasure in promoting agriculture and sharing their passion. They must, since they have to find the time between their classes and their homework. However, their many volunteer hours have been rewarded in receiving various awards and recognition from *Défi-Coop*, the *Concours québécois en entrepreneuriat* and from *Gala Force Avenir*. The workshops are offered at a cost of \$2.50 per child. "In 2006, we met with 550 children and we will definitely beat that record this year," calculates Marie-Michelle. In fact, the 2008 calendar is already filling up since two schools, one with 180 students, have already reserved the services of *Agriteliens* for one of their professional development days.

*Julie Mercier  
LTCN 2007-12-20*

## **U.S. Farm Bill passes the Senate**

The U.S. Senate has passed, through a majority vote of 79 to 14, a generous new version of the American agricultural policy (Farm Bill), with a budget of \$286 billion (USD) over five years.

This new December 14 version does not significantly change the legislation passed by the House of Representatives in July and the senators rejected many of the modifications proposed by the Bush Administration.

Consequently, this will certainly not facilitate any agreement at the WTO negotiations, since the U.S. have not shown any hint of compromise.

“I am extremely happy to see the Senate reject a good number of the hostile amendments and to finally vote for a Farm Bill that maintains direct payments, including supplementary aid in cases of catastrophe,” declared John Thaemert, president of the National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG). Thaemert’s response confirms that all of the major programmes supporting commodity crops have remained intact. In fact, the budget of \$286 billion is \$109 billion more than the previous Farm Bill (2002-2007).

The Senate accepted a ban where meat processors may not directly own cattle, and also proposed the creation of a special office to advise and investigate the question of competition in the cattle industry. Vertical integrators, both in the pork and beef sectors, may have to review some of their contracts. The controversial country-of-origin labelling has been kept, starting in September 2008 for pork, beef, lamb and goat products. The Senate also plans to promote the production of biofuels and the consumption of fruits and vegetables.

Support for the American dairy sector was not left out, with an increase in payments to producers through the Milk Income Loss Contract as well as a minimum price for cheese, butter and non-fat solids.

### **Possible veto**

The present legislation has not yet passed final approval since it must be presented to the Congress (representatives and senators) to allow the versions of the two Houses to be reconciled. Following this, President George W. Bush could use his veto power to force the elected representatives to redo their work. The Bush administration, through its Department of Agriculture (USDA), had proposed, without success, a ceiling \$250,000 per farm on direct aid payments.

*Thierry Larivière*  
*LTCN 2007-12-20*

## **Putting a bit of Quebec on your plate—a good resolution**

**Christian Lacasse**  
**UPA President**

The movement for food sovereignty is making headway. After the “*Nourrir notre monde*” event last fall, followed by a unanimous resolution passed at UPA’s general congress in December on the same subject, MAPAQ finally came on board last week. In fact, its new policy, “Put Quebec on your plate,” is aimed at increasing the purchase and consumption of Quebec food products—a strategy that the ministry hopes to implement in partnership with industry stakeholders and the support of consumers.

This type of initiative is welcomed news. The agricultural community has been pushing for a “buy locally” policy for some time now. In addition, the general population has

become more and more aware of this question. That is why the promotion of Quebec food products was identified as the number one topic at Quebec's recent Commission on the Future of Agriculture and Agri-food.

Choosing one food over another is more than just a question of taste and price: social and environmental considerations also come into play. A Quebec tomato that ends up on our table supports the local economy and agriculture. Its freshness is guaranteed and we know under what conditions it was produced. We cannot say the same for its Mexican competitor, which has travelled thousands of kilometres with the help of a considerable amount of diesel fuel...

When we put Quebec on our plates, we are not only making a choice for quality and freshness, but also for the agriculture in our neighbourhoods, which is a source of livelihood for local families, contributes to regional development, protects our resources and produces food according to known standards. In short, we make a choice for the agriculture we want. It is for this reason that food sovereignty has become such a powerful rallying cry.

Agriculture Minister Laurent Lessard is promoting this same objective when he says "We must encourage consumers to give priority to Quebec food products when making their purchasing decisions." The new measures that he announced are a step in the right direction and the first sign of what could become a new government strategy. However, more is needed to develop our food sovereignty.

Other government ministries must also contribute, including Health, Education, and Tourism. Certain regulatory changes will also be required, such as the sale of farm-produced alcoholic beverages in specialty shops and boutiques—as is currently being done in Ontario. And why can't the government set an example by requiring its public institution network to give priority to Quebec products?

At Christmas, New Year's and throughout the year, we have many excellent opportunities to buy our own local produce. However, giving them priority in our purchasing decisions must be a personal choice...and we must also be able to find them. While waiting for a real identification strategy, our best approach still remains to ask our grocer or restaurant owner.

This could be your New Year's resolution. Ask them!

*LTCN 2007-12-20*

## **A new vaccination protocol for feeder calves**

As of January 1, 2008, feeder calf producers must now employ a new vaccination protocol. “We have realized through new veterinary medicine research that the protocol that has been in place for the past three or four years can be improved to increase calf immunity as they enter feedlots,” explained Alain Juneau, president of the Feeder Calf Marketing Committee of the *Fédération des producteurs de bovins du Québec*. “We believe that, in the long term, by improving the health of calves, Quebec buyers will be more satisfied and this will lead to more money in producers’ pockets,” added the Quebec City region beef producer.

As of January, two protocols will be accepted. Farmers that use live vaccines must vaccinate between the time the calf reaches the age of four months until two weeks before it is sold. Producers who choose killed vaccines must add a booster shot four weeks after the first dose, but within the same period of four months of age and a minimum of two weeks before the auction. “It is important that this be respected because we will refuse calves that have not been vaccinated according to the new protocol,” warned Juneau. The new procedure will also allow for blood samples to be taken in order to verify that the vaccinations have been properly administered. The specialized auctions will also require proof of purchase of the vaccine and a signed declaration from the producer.

Various vaccination initiatives have been implemented over the past seven years. During the 1999-2000 season, auctions made mention of any vaccinated feeder calves passing through their ring. The following year, certain sales were reserved exclusively for vaccinated animals. It was not until the 2004-2005 season that the entire specialized auction circuit became reserved for vaccinated calves only.

### **A gloomy autumn**

Last fall was marked by a drop in prices. “Between \$0.10 - \$0.15/lb and sometimes \$0.20/lb less than in 2006 in certain weeks,” indicated the president of the Feeder Calf Marketing Committee. Volumes were also down by about eight per cent compared to 2006. “We expect that we will see these (unsold) calves in January,” speculated Juneau.

The first auction of the New Year is scheduled for January 16 in La Guadeloupe.

*Julie Mercier*  
*LTCN 2007-12-20*

## Private-forest owners banking on woodlot management

Private-forest wood producers believe they can help the forestry sector to successfully get through their present crisis. The private sector is suggesting that the Quebec government intensify woodlot management measures by committing five, ten and 15 million dollars over the next three years. Private forest representatives also propose the creation of a forestry fund, where all forest users would be called upon to contribute.

“Two poor people do not make a rich person,” declared Pierre-Maurice Gagnon, president of the *Fédération des producteurs de bois du Québec*, hoping for prosperity for mill owners “so they are able to pay us.” Gagnon was attending the Summit on the Future of the Forestry Sector organized under the auspices of Laval University, its objective being that the forest could again become a source of collective pride.

“Our grandfathers had a forestry culture,” affirmed Gagnon. “Private forestry provides for 20 per cent of the demand, but it could be increased to 30 per cent. There is plenty of wood available but there are no buyers. It’s important that the minister (Claude Béchar) sends a clear message regarding the residuality principle.”

Newly elected UPA president Christian Lacasse indicated that wood producers are feeling the consequences at the farm level because mills are getting their supply primarily from public forests.

“Producers are left holding their wood. They must become part of the solution,” Lacasse declared, adding that wood producers are demanding better access to markets for wood from private woodlots. They also want forestry management programs and short-term financial support from the government.

An unexpected reaction came from a representative for research agencies and universities, who noted that agro-environmental clubs were making a significant contribution to an agriculture respectful of the environment. Bernard Beaudin, director at the University of Quebec and ex-president of the *Fondation de la Faune du Québec*, noted that forestry could follow this example by creating clubs to act as a link between research and practice.

“The creation of agro-environmental clubs has made its mark,” he affirmed. “They have made a significant impact through the use of innovative farm practices.”

### Forestry fund

The president of the *Regroupement des sociétés d’aménagement forestier du Québec (RESAM)*, Jean-Guy Rioux, proposed the creation of a multi-vocational forestry fund. All stakeholders in a particular forest, including mill owners, hunters and recreational users would be called upon to contribute to this fund, with the objective of re-building the deciduous forest. Rioux, who is completing his last mandate as head of the

*Regroupement*, also added that besides forestry improvement work, the fund could also serve to finance research into multi-vocational forests or new forestry models. “Jobs can be created immediately. Besides forestry improvement work, there are not many other ways to create forestry jobs rapidly,” he acknowledged.

The Summit also saw several bitter exchanges on the question of the price of wood fibre. The president of the *Conseil de l’industrie forestière du Québec*, Guy Chevrette, declared that Quebec has the highest price for wood fibre. “It is in Quebec that we find the highest priced wood chips in the world,” he maintained, challenging private forest representatives to ask themselves why they have difficulty in selling their wood.

The director-general of the *Fédération des producteurs de bois du Québec*, Jean-Pierre Dansereau, denied this allegation, declaring that wood fibre is more expensive in several other provinces, in the U.S. and in Europe. He insisted that the study tabled by the *Conseil de l’industrie forestière* is based on outdated and incomplete data. “If the industry compares the price of wood in Quebec, from either public or private forests, to that paid in certain other territories where prices are held artificially low, without any connection to a competitive market, then you can be sure that the private forest will never find itself in a favourable light in such a comparison.”

*Pierre-Yvon Bégin*  
*LTCN 2007-12-20*

## **Beef imports on the rise**

During the past few months, the rapid increase in the value of the Canadian dollar has left the door wide open for beef imports, particularly from the U.S.

After hitting a low in 2003 and 2004, American beef imports have accelerated due to the fast-rising loonie. The closing of several Canadian slaughterhouses and the decreased production levels of those that remain in business have also left a large opening for American products. Between January and the end of November, American imports have shot up by 33 per cent. In fact, Canada is the U.S.’s second largest market for beef exports. Looking at all countries combined, imports of beef into Canada have grown by 48 per cent since last January and by 26 per cent between 2006 and 2007. They have now reached about 70 per cent of the volumes seen in 2002. During that period before the mad-cow crisis, 33 per cent of Canada’s beef consumption came from imported meat (primarily boned beef products).

Quebec beef producers sell about 200,000 steers per year. If that number was slaughtered locally, the meat would satisfy approximately 40 per cent of the province’s demand for cut meat. In reality, Quebec’s beef supply comes mainly from Western Canada and from the U.S. The situation has become even more clear since the closure of Z. Billete, Quebec’s largest meat packing plant for steers. Currently, half of Quebec-produced steers

are slaughtered in the U.S. It is highly probable that some of the meat from these animals is shipped back into Quebec as American beef.

During the past several months, Canadian packing plants have been complaining about their loss of competitiveness due to their obligation to remove specific risk materials (SRM), a regulation that American slaughterhouses do not have to adhere to. The Canadian industry estimates that the additional costs due to SRM are between \$10 and \$50 per head.

### **Not increasing at the same rate**

Since the drastic decline in 2003, Canadian beef has been attempting to regain its share of the international market. According to Ann Fornasier, an economist with the *Fédération des producteurs de bovines du Québec (FPBQ)*, the province's beef exports in 2007 were still 30 per cent below 2002 levels. Before the May 2003 embargo, almost 70 per cent of this country's beef was exported outside our borders. Canada also exported live animals. In fact, about 20 per cent of Canadian steers and 40 per cent of our cull cattle were shipped to the U.S. for slaughter.

*Julie Mercier*  
*LTCN 2007-12-20*

## **People do not understand the residuality principle, says forestry president**

Private-forest representatives feel that they have been heard at the Summit on the Future of Quebec's Forestry Sector. The president of the *Fédération des producteurs de bois du Québec*, Pierre-Maurice Gagnon believes that he has found some allies concerning the residuality principle, which gives priority to private forests in the marketing of wood.

"People do not understand residuality," Gagnon declared in a statement following the Summit. The FPBQ president considers that the exercise was a good opportunity to get people to recognize the contributions of private forests, even if wood producers did not end up with any concrete gains. "The problem is not solved by any means," he conceded. "But people were listening and our suggestion to intensify forestry improvement work (five, ten and 15 million dollars over three years) is very positive."

The president of the *Regroupement des sociétés d'aménagement forestiers du Québec (RESAM)*, Jean-Guy Rioux had the same opinion. "We are learning to work together and the partners are willing to rise above their own personal interests and look at the collective interests."

The minister of Natural Resources and Wildlife, Claude Béchard, announced his intentions to make some major changes. Bévhard clearly indicated that “the old Forestry Regime no longer exists” and that he would be tabling a Green Paper early in 2008 to redefine a new forestry management policy. Following a period of consultation, he hopes that the new Forestry Regime will come into effect by the end of 2008. Asked about the residuality principle, the minister warned that he expects compromises. “We need a residuality principle that is practical,” the minister told French-language newspaper *La Terre de chez Nous*. “This will all be re-examined in the Green Paper. I hope that wood producers will be satisfied, but when major changes are made, everybody will be affected. When we say that the *status quo* is no longer feasible and that we can no longer continue in this manner, then everyone will be called upon to put water in their wine.”

The task of delivering a summary of the results on the Summit fell upon the rector of Laval University and president of the event, Denis Brière. He announced that the Summit participants had come to a common agreement on the doubling of forest output over the next 25 years. They also agreed to double the network of protected areas as early as 2008, increasing their area to the equivalent of eight per cent of the total territory. In addition, the common declaration made reference to dynamic communities where “private forests are considered as an essential part of the solution of supply management.”

Brière admitted that there are no miracle solutions. At a press conference, he conceded that the wood market was not about to rebound soon and that producers would have to be patient. “The predictions for 2008 are worse than those for 2007,” he acknowledged. “We must get through this period and get ready for an upswing. We have to continue attracting the younger generation and also develop our secondary and tertiary wood transformation.”

*Pierre-Yvon Bégin*  
*LTCN 2007-12-20*

## **The TAQ can't look at new evidence**

The *Commission de la protection du territoire agricole du Québec (CPTAQ)* and the UPA federations of Saint-Hyacinthe and Saint-Jean-Valleyfield have just won two major victories. However, their gain doesn't have anything to do with the area to be excluded from the green zone, but rather on the clarification of the powers of the *Tribunal administrative du Québec (TAQ)*, the body charged with hearing appeals of CPTAQ decisions.

According to article 21.4 in the *Act regarding the Protection of the Agricultural Zone and Agricultural Activities (LPTAA)*, commission decisions may be contested if they contain significant errors in fact or in law. However, Article 21.4 does not permit the appeal tribunal—in this case, the TAQ—to hear new evidence or to conduct its own investigation. Nevertheless, this is what the TAQ did in the cases of Saint-Pie and Vergers Leahy.

*In the Saint-Pie case, the municipality wanted to exclude an area of eight hectares from the agricultural zone in order to enlarge its industrial park. In 2002, the CPTAQ rejected the request, judging that sufficient space was still available in the white zone. Based on new evidence, the TAQ reversed that decision.*

Maintaining that the TAQ had exceeded its powers, the CPTAQ and the *UPA Saint-Hyacinthe* appealed before Court of Quebec. After failing there, they then brought the case before the Quebec Superior Court. On December 10, the Honourable Judge Marc-André Blanchard decided in their favour. In his 30-page judgement, the magistrate overturned the verdict of the Court of Quebec and annulled the TAQ's decision. He also included a reminder that the TAQ must be a guardian of the protection of the agricultural zone, just as much as the CPTAQ.

### **The Vergers Leahy case**

The Vergers Leahy case raised the same questions. In that trial, business owners wished to use 8106.5 square metres of agricultural land to pump and bottle underground water. In 2004, the CPTAQ rejected their request. Almost nine months later, the TAQ reversed the decision, following the introduction of new evidence. In January 2007, the Court of Quebec rejected an appeal filed by the Commission and *UPA Saint-Jean-Valleyfield*. Finally, the case ended up in Quebec Superior Court. On December 10, the court reversed the decisions of the TAQ and of the Court of Quebec and decided in favour of the CPTAQ and the regional UPA. However, the case, as well as that of Saint-Pie, could be appealed.

In both the Saint-Pie and Vergers Leahy trials, two laws clashed: the LPTAA with its article 21.4 and the *Loi sur la justice administrative (LJA)*. In making his decision, the Honourable Justice Blanchard of the Quebec Superior Court believed that it is necessary to give precedence to the law that is most specific, in this case, the LPTAA. "Since article 21.4 of the LPTAA seems to be the wrench that is jamming the works of the administrative justice machine... it is up to the legislator to fix it, not the Tribunal," wrote the magistrate. Consequently, he suggested a "legislative tune-up" to address the issue, which has been brought up many times by detractors of the LPTAA in recent months.

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