

Advocate

QFA plans for the future

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From left to right: William Sauer, QFA President; William Sauer, QFA President; William Sauer, QFA President; William Sauer, QFA President.

Editorial Advocate Staff Reporter

The General Assembly of the Quebec Federation of Agriculture (QFA) was held at the Sheraton Hotel in Montreal on November 5. It was a historic event as it marked the 25th anniversary of the QFA's incorporation. The QFA's 25th anniversary was celebrated with a gala dinner and a concert at the Sheraton Hotel. The QFA's 25th anniversary was celebrated with a gala dinner and a concert at the Sheraton Hotel.

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Stay a little bit
proud of why you
became a farmer

—Randy Allen

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QFA EDITORIAL:

Fat cats on welfare – think again!

Ivan Hale

QFA Executive Director

You've heard it before. The conversation is repeated in coffee shops across Canada. First, we talk about our main preoccupation, the weather. Second, we switch to our other favourite topic, the government. Then, if time permits, the conversation frequently switches to "those bums living off the system." There seems to be a general perception that too many Canadians enjoy the good life through collecting welfare.

Truth be told, with 1.5 million Canadians living in poverty today, the facts just don't support the notion that those who are collecting welfare are abusing the system.

Statistics Canada reminds us that there is still no consensus on what constitutes poverty in our country. It gives this as a reason why it cannot measure the level of poverty in Canada. However, it essentially refers to the poverty line with the term "Low Income Cut-Offs" (LICOs). They identify who in our society is worse off than the average citizen. The definition of who is poor varies by family size and size of community. They are calculated based on the spending patterns of families on basic necessities such as food, shelter and clothing.

Certain trends are clear. In the last two to three decades senior citizens were by far the largest group of low-income Canadians. We have made significant progress in improving their incomes. Now, an alarming number of families living in poverty are single-parent families headed by women.

According to the publication "Welfare Incomes 2005," published by the National Council of Welfare, no province has welfare incomes that even come close to reaching the poverty line. To put it another way, individuals collecting welfare do not *fare well* at all. In no province did single employable people receiving welfare reach an income that amounts to even 50 percent of the poverty line. In Quebec, welfare incomes only provided the poor with 33 per cent of the money needed to live above the poverty level. Quebeckers living in poverty had to come up with the additional two-thirds on their own.

When looking at statistics about poverty-stricken Canadians, it's important to remember that all each province and territory has its own welfare system. The poverty line also varies depending on the province where we live. For example, it costs less to live in Atlantic Canada and Saskatchewan, so the poverty line for a single person in those provinces is \$17,895. For a couple with two children ages 10 and 15, it is \$33,251. In all other provinces, including Quebec, the poverty level for a single person is \$20,778 and \$38,610 for a couple with two children.

Fortunately, most provinces allow welfare recipients to keep a certain amount of earned income without causing a reduction in welfare levels received.

Those who complain about so-called “lazy welfare bums” simply don’t see the big picture. Close to 650,000 people in Canada who live in poverty are actually working—many doing jobs that most people would not accept, and for very low wages.

Forty per cent of poor Canadians work, but cannot earn enough to have a quality of life for their families. Couple with this the fact that 40 per cent of low income Canadians are classified as self-employed and are not eligible to collect employment insurance. And, keep in mind most do not have health or dental benefits.

Some welfare recipients know too well that they would be worse off if they accepted low-paying jobs. Despite working long hours, many of the working poor are still as poor as persons collecting welfare. So where is the incentive to work?

Our country is rich in resources and opportunities, so what can we do to prevent poverty and alleviate the shame that often comes with it?

First, keep in mind that low-income neighbours will always be with us. Show them some kindness and consideration.

Second, don’t cheat the system. When you hire workers, whether part-time, seasonal or full-time, pay them a fair wage and remit deductions at source to government. Not only is it in their best interest, it’s ours too. The labour shortage on farms will only be improved if we provide decent working conditions and a fair return for their efforts.

Third, support the movement calling upon our federal government to follow the example of Britain and the United States by reforming Canada’s income security program to supplement the earnings of low-wage workers. The TD Bank and a broad range of social policy groups have already made this recommendation. Can Canada afford to do so? Of course we can! Consider this: the government has said it will make a further 1 per cent cut to the GST within the next four years, saving Canadians \$5.2 billion annually. Frankly, the benefits will be negligible for most of us. According to a recent editorial in *The Toronto Star*, if this money were instead used to provide an earned income supplement to the working poor then the average earnings of low-income earners could be increased 50 per cent!

Please think about what we can and ought to do and discuss it the next time you order a coffee at Tim Horton’s. Remember, we are our neighbour’s keeper.

QFA board members change

The QFA board of directors held a brief meeting during the lunch break of their recent AGM. The election of the board of directors was the first order of business and Wendall Conner, member for Ayer's Cliff, was nominated to the Executive Committee. Conner replaces Ronald Strutt, who stepped down as an executive member but stays on as board member for Pontiac.

All other board members and executive positions were re-elected. The QFA would like to welcome Wendall Conner, and thank Ronald Strutt for serving on the Executive Committee.

AgVision TV host delights QFA members

Andrew McClelland
Advocate Staff Reporter

"Every year in agriculture, some things we know are certain," said Kevin Stewart, keynote speaker at the QFA's educational program held at Macdonald College on November 3. "We know that some kind of new crisis is going to arise, costs of productions are going to increase, and—in the province of Ontario—we expect the Toronto Maple Leafs to crash and burn as they do every year."

The question of what to do in a crisis was Stewart's key theme in his address to QFA members and other observers at Macdonald College. In his talk, "What is the Cost of Doing Nothing?" the host of the AgVision television series cautioned agricultural producers of the dangers of sitting on their hands when crisis strikes.

"A positive image of this country's agriculture is being persistently eroded away by environmentalist and activist groups," claims Stewart. "The solution? Constant presence by farmers in the public eye, presenting a positive image to fight that."

Stewart, also known for his work as a producer for CTV's coverage of the 1994 winter Olympics in Lillehammer, Norway, encouraged farmers to "regain brand trust" with the public by actively communicating with consumers.

"It's not an easy thing to do," Stewart remarked. "Communicating with consumers is time-consuming and expensive. But if it's done right, it pays off big dividends."

Stewart also stayed for the day's wine-and-cheese reception and took the opportunity to participate in talks with QFA members about the provincial Commission on the Future of Agriculture and Agri-food.

QFA plans for the future

Andrew McClelland
Advocate Staff Reporter

The Centennial Centre Ballroom of Macdonald College was filled with eager participants of the Quebec Farmers' Association's (QFA) annual general meeting on November 3. Upwards of 200 association members, Macdonald College students, and key figures from the province's agricultural scene were in attendance for a lively educational program followed by a positive and enthusiastic presentation of the QFA's 2006 annual report.

Participants at last year's annual general meeting were pleased to hear further proof that the organization is progressing towards its goal of building a solid financial base. Looking forward to the organization's fiftieth anniversary, QFA President Gib Drury said, "I am confident that the QFA is here to stay; we have a dedicated membership, an enthusiastic board, a very competent and knowledgeable staff—all the key ingredients for a successful future."

Similarly optimistic about the future was the executive director's report delivered by Ivan Hale. Speaking of the overwhelmingly positive reaction to the organization's community outreach, Hale noted that a new era seems to be afoot for the QFA and for the agricultural community at large.

"There is a new sense of pride in our community and in our organization. We don't have time or interest in pessimism or negativism. The QFA has a new attitude and is upbeat."

The QFA's executive director also gave a brief summary of the association's accomplishments from the past year, citing its cooperation with the *Union des producteurs agricoles* in pressuring Quebec to change the municipal taxation scheme for agricultural land. Hale noted that media reporting on QFA initiatives dramatically increased in the past year, and that the organization was working on a number of farm safety projects.

"Our efforts are all directed towards ensuring a sustainable future for English-speaking farmers in Quebec, and they are paying off," said the executive director.

Hale assured QFA members that the organization continues to press for more English information from both the *Ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation du Québec* (MAPAQ) and *La Financière Agricole*, and that the association will be taking an active role in the Commission on the Future of Quebec Agriculture and Agri-food.

The festivities of the day were made possible by the numerous generous sponsors who supported the event. (A full list of annual general meeting sponsors can be found on page 5 of this issue.) Sponsorship of the meeting increased by 25 per cent this year—a sign that the agricultural world is recognizing the importance and advantages in partnering with the QFA.

John McCart, chair of the QFA's membership committee, reported that membership grew by 50 per cent in 2006, a trend that the board of directors expects will continue in 2007. The executive member for Argenteuil also cited that member benefits are becoming more attractive all the time,

with members now able to enjoy special rates on car rentals, QFA publications, as well as discounts on computer and software purchases through the organization.

Members were informed that a partnership with the Canadian Farm Business Management Council is being expanded. Beginning this fall, all *Advocate* readers will receive bi-monthly newsletters from the Council called *Canadian Farm Manager*.

QFA Treasurer Chris Judd offered members a thorough breakdown of the association's financial details for the last fiscal year. He informed members that a balanced budget has been approved for the current year. At mid-way through the year the QFA is in a positive financial position.

Office Manager Paméla Ledoux gave a demonstration of the QFA's website at www.QuebecFarmers.org, which made its appearance on the web in March 2006. Andrew McClelland, managing editor of the *Advocate*, spoke of the changes that have been made to the publication in the past year. McClelland also gave members a glimpse at the new developments in store for 2007, such as a new annual readership questionnaire and increased regional coverage in the paper.

Participants took their catered lunch in the ballroom where, as part of the annual general meeting tradition, student awards for Macdonald College's Farm Management and Technology Program were presented. QFA Director Malcolm Fraser presented the recipients of the QFA's Warren Grapes Agricultural Education Fund with bursaries. Fraser, who acts as chair of the fund, presented cheques to Chris Allen, Jennifer Bradley, Adam Nelson, and Simon Rember. The Warren Grapes Agricultural Education Fund provides bursaries to students from the English-speaking rural and farming communities who are pursuing post-secondary agricultural and silvicultural education.

Macdonald College Dean Chandra A. Madramootoo was also on-hand for the occasion. Madramootoo spoke of the fruitful relationship that Macdonald College has long enjoyed with the QFA, and noted that his college is always open to further partnerships with the organization.

QFA members and observers were treated to a series of talks in the morning's lively educational program. Gino Pelletier, agricultural economist with *UPA Développement International* (UPA-DI), spoke of the role that Quebec farmers can play on actively supporting farmers in developing countries. Pelletier noted that many of the problems facing agricultural producers in nations that are emerging from poverty, colonialism, and political unrest are surprisingly similar to the dilemmas in Canadian farming.

"Many of the problems that may seem a world away, taking place in Africa, are occurring in a slightly different context in North America. Many African families are witnessing their children turning their backs on agriculture as a profession and way of life. That is certainly also the case in Canada and Quebec."

Pelletier emphasized that UPA-DI is partnering with farmers in developing nations, and stated that he hopes the QFA will be able to participate and contribute to their ongoing programs. Gib

Drury informed the meeting that QFA's executive director was leaving on a mission to Niger in West Africa the following day.

Kevin Stewart delivered the keynote address of the day with an entertaining talk entitled "What is the Cost of Doing Nothing?" The popular AgVision television series host spoke of the danger in not acting quickly when crisis hits industry, and urged the agricultural community to work against the negative image that many consumers have of today's farming practices.

"Dealing with a crisis like the one going on in the public perception of agriculture requires immediate action," Stewart told the group. "Farmers need to rebuild brand trust with the public. Let them know what you're doing, how you're acting as a citizen with a conscience. If you just sit and wait doing nothing during a crisis, you'll pay the cost."

"This has been a great day," said Margaret Cheal, QFA board member from North Hatley. "Kevin gave an excellent presentation; it's nice to have a speaker who is entertaining and interesting, and who speaks as well as he does."

UPA Second vice-president Denis Bilodeau was a guest at the meeting. Bilodeau, speaking in English and French, commented on the successful ways to cope with crises in agriculture, noting that Quebec farmers are among the most prepared in the country.

"There are many areas in agriculture in which we have no control," said Bilodeau. "The BSE crisis, or the recent golden nematode problem that temporarily affected Quebec's export of potatoes, are good examples. But thanks to our collective marketing agreements, Quebec farmers came through these crises better than anyone else in the country."

The day ended with a combined wine-and-cheese reception and workshop discussions. Participants were able to enjoy an impressive snack table thanks to food supplied by the annual general meeting's sponsors, and were also treated to donated door-prizes including gift certificates, cookbooks and the grand prize of a digital camera. Members then engaged in lively discussions to prepare their input to QFA's upcoming report to the Commission on the Future of Quebec Agriculture and Agri-food, and for their ideas on how the organization should commemorate its fiftieth anniversary in 2007.

"Overall the day was good and informative," said Douglas Moorhead, QFA board member for Argenteuil. "I liked the round table talk at the end, with the wine and cheese. It was nice to feel like we were contributing."

Ayer's Cliff QFA has a new president

Margaret Cheal, Secretary
QFA Ayer's Cliff

The regular meeting of the Ayer's Cliff branch of the QFA was held on October 5, 2006, and we are pleased to announce that Wallace Mosher has been chosen as our new president.

After President Robert Sutor welcomed everyone and told the group he was pleased with the turn-out for the meeting, Graydon Majury, representing the Nominating Committee, presented the new slate of officers.

Wallace Mosher was named the new president of the branch; Wendall Conner will act as vice-president; Margaret Cheal will remain secretary, and the role of treasurer will be filled by Myrna Conner. After the new slate of officers was accepted, Graydon thanked Bob Sutor for his years of service as president on behalf of all the members.

We were also fortunate to have Charles Catchpugh, editor of *The Outlet*, act as our guest speaker. He spoke about the family farm and the many changes it has seen over the years.

The Ayer's Cliff QFA Christmas party was also discussed. The party will be held from 5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at the Legion in Ayer's Cliff. All are welcome to attend and celebrate the holiday season with us!

A major drop in the farm-income index

The farm-income index, as calculated by the *Financière agricole du Québec*, dropped below zero and reached -0.7 in 2006. This economic indicator, a reference tool reserved exclusively for the farming sector, registered a seven per cent decrease in net farm income for Quebec producers, which will probably total about \$600 million at the end of the year. In its second year of use, as this economic barometer drops below zero, it predicts a worsening of the agricultural financial situation.

The president and CEO of the *Financière agricole du Québec*, Jacques Brind'Amour, noted that farmers were not able to avoid the general market trends. In addition to the increase in the Canadian dollar and rising energy costs, they had to deal with a major disease in the pork sector and falling prices in the grain sector. As a result, the net farm income of farmers in 2006 will probably be down by about \$50 million. "People do not realize it yet, but the impact will be major," he stated. "It has really mushroomed."

The *Financière agricole's* CEO also concluded that the various programs available to producers "play a critical role" in stabilizing their incomes. In 2005, they received about \$750 million, including the CAIS program and the tax reimbursement program. Of this amount, \$436 million

was paid out through the Income Stabilization Insurance program (ASRA). In 2006, ASRA payments will practically double to about \$862 million.

More productive

Looking at the big picture, Jacques Brind'Amour believes that Quebec agriculture is doing well. He noted that studies of production costs indicate that farmers are more productive than ever, with increases of about \$700 million over the last five years. He also mentioned that the insurance coverage values have increased steadily, with a 6.6 per cent rise during the last year. "Crop yields are also up," he added. "For corn, our production model uses 7.2 tons per hectare. We will no doubt be increasing that to eight tons per hectare. This means that some farmers will reach 11 or even 13 tons per hectare. That is excellent."

Unfortunately, Jacques Brind'Amour admitted that production costs have also been increasing constantly since 2001. He was optimistic, however, when looking at the unexpected rise in the price of corn to \$160 a ton. In this regard, he believes that ethanol will eventually play an important role in determining prices. And finally, the pork sector seems to be on the road to controlling diseases.

"In hog production, we are relatively optimistic," he acknowledged. "If the grain situation can stabilize, it will certainly be a significant break."

With the numbers shown by the farm-income index, Jacques Brind'Amour thinks that bankers will receive a message of "caution." Looking to the future, he believes that the work of the *Commission on the Future of Agriculture and Agri-food* will probably be a "determining factor." His organization plans to follow these developments closely.

"Slowly but surely, Quebec's agriculture is diversifying towards new emerging productions. In blueberries, for instance, production will reach 60 to 65 million pounds this year and prices are very good. The same is also apparent in cranberry production."

Pierre-Yvon Bégin
LTCN 2006-11-09

Liberalization of trade for specific grains at CWB

The Harper government's project to give western producers free choice in the marketing of wheat and barley seems to have taken a new turn.

The parliamentary secretary to Canada's minister of agriculture, Jacques Gourde, confirms that his government's project to give free-choice marketing to producers is mostly aimed at specific grains, such as organic grains.

“This is for more specific grain. It isn’t for the usual large volumes,” explained the parliamentary secretary in an interview with French-language newspaper *La Terre de Chez Nous*. Gourde believes that the major part of the volumes of wheat and barley will remain in the hands of the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB). It should not be too difficult, then, for the CWB to negotiate rental contracts for the elevators with the multinationals who own the majority of this equipment, which is essential to exports.

Along with organic wheat and barley, grains with pharmaceutical properties and other specific varieties could benefit from the end of the CWB monopoly. “There is an important demand for organic wheat and they (producers) have to provide it illegally. It’s nonsense,” says Gourde, who adds that this particular grain is currently mixed in with the rest in large elevators. “This is the root of the problem,” says the Conservative member. One solution would be to introduce a type of preserved identity (PI), which was successful with Quebec soya, by enabling grain segregation with a view to commercialization.

Gourde does not understand that the *Bloc Québécois* and other parties are opposed to this liberalization of trade for specific grains. “These are partisan games of opposition parties who don’t think of the producers,” he believes.

In spite of this entreaty, the private law project of Conservative MP Gerry Ritz (C-300), which would have put an end to the Canadian Wheat Board’s monopoly, was defeated 149 votes to 111, the opposition having voted against the government.

In spite of this, the government continues to forge ahead and Minister Chuck Strahl has unveiled a four-step plan, recommended by his work-group, which outlines the transition towards a commercialization system whereby the CWB would be voluntary and would belong to the producers. The minister has not made a decision yet on this issue but the government has always promised to give producers free choice as to commercialization.

Liberalization of joint marketing plans

“This vote (C-300) leads us to believe that Mr. André Bellavance, MP of Richmond-Arthabaska and Bloc agriculture critic, would like to take away the right of Quebec producers the freedom which they possess to choose how they will market their products, freedom that the government of Canada also wishes to give to western farmers,” declared Jacques Gourde, in an official memo.

La Terre de Chez Nous asked the parliamentary secretary if the numerous joint marketing plans in Quebec (milk, maple syrup, wheat, cull cattle, pork, goat’s milk, etc.) were threatened by this willingness to let Quebec producers “commercialize their products as they see fit.” “Quebec producers have taken themselves in hand. That’s voluntary and we are for freedom of choice”, replied Gourde, who adds that Quebec producers can always modify their marketing systems to adapt to new markets.

Following this logic, the parliamentary secretary believes that western producers should also have the choice and the power to vote for changes to the CWB. “I have no problem with that,” he says. Manitoba producers will be holding just such a vote in the near future.

The debate rages on out west. For instance Wendy Holm, an ex-columnist for the *Western Producer*, the main farm news magazine for western Canada, claims that she has lost her job as farm journalist for having defended a position that went against the Harper government’s project for the CWB. Jacques Gourde flatly denies that the minister’s cabinet was involved in this affair. “That’s utterly false. That was a decision of the magazine,” replied the parliamentary secretary.

Thierry Larivière
LTCN 2006-11-02

Autoroute 30—going the wrong way!

Laurent Pellerin
UPA President

There is always skepticism in the air when it comes to announcements regarding the construction of Autoroute 30, and November 6 was no different. However, it is certainly not a laughing matter for farmers who are seeing their land being expropriated to build a section of an autoroute. If the project goes ahead as planned, more than 600 hectares of Quebec’s best farmland will be sacrificed, even though there is an alternative route that would be beneficial both for agriculture and for the government coffers! Furthermore, farmers are not the only dissatisfied group, since 96 per cent of Quebecers support them regarding the protection of the agricultural zone.

By insisting on the present project, the government is saying no to an alternative route (by way of Highway 132) that is respectful of the collective agricultural heritage that has served the livelihood of entire families for generations. It is saying no to a route that would cost considerably less money; no to a route that would be completed much faster; no to a route that would be several kilometres shorter; no to a route that observes the basic principles of good land-use planning; no to a route that has already undergone the necessary expropriations and which is already zoned industrial and commercial, for the most part; no to a route that many citizens and merchants are counting on to unclog Highway 132 and at the same time restore vitality to the local economy.

Moreover, it is much too easy for them to justify their actions by hiding behind the recommendations of the *Bureau d’audiences publiques sur l’environnement* (BAPE), which never really came down decisively in this particular case (“the impact study did not permit us to conclude unequivocally,” wrote the BAPE). And rightly so, since the *Commission de protection du territoire agricole* (CPTAQ)—another agency under the jurisdiction of the same government—also declared, not once, not twice, but three times, that it was against the project—a viewpoint which our decision-makers clearly try to ignore.

In addition, this choice does not comply with the principles supposedly highly valued by this government. For instance, according to estimates obtained from the *Ministère des transports*, it would cost \$217 million to build within the present right-of-way of Highway 132, compared to between \$666 million and \$766 million on agricultural land. Three times the cost! This is certainly paradoxical for an administration that advocates—and rightly so—the careful management of public finances. This paradox is no less evident when it comes to the basic principles of sustainable development, which this government elevated to the ranks of measures that are above the law. Also, it is difficult not to see in this decision an encouragement to urban sprawl and the disintegration of the agricultural zone. Did all of these fine principles fall by the wayside...of an autoroute?

Back in January 2003, the construction of Autoroute 30 had been authorized along the axis of Highway 132. Had it not been for a reversal of this decision, the work would no doubt have been started in the same year and would probably have been finished in 2006. Last Sunday, we would not have had to witness such a show to convince us of the merits of this construction; we would have been there to cut the ribbon. This is precisely the problem with Autoroute 30: a project that has repeatedly being re-started and that would be headed in the right direction if not for the numerous detours it keeps taking, which are detrimental to agriculture's heritage, to sound public financial management, to sustainable development and generally speaking, to basic common sense.

LTCN 2006-11-09

The UPA faces the federal finance committee

Without a vigorous and rapid intervention by Ottawa, the survival of the agricultural sector is in jeopardy. That's the message, which could not be clearer, that the second Vice-president of the *Union des producteurs agricoles* (UPA), Denis Bilodeau, delivered to the members of the federal finance committee of the Chamber of Commons in Quebec, last Wednesday.

“The situation of Quebec and Canadian producers keeps deteriorating,” said Denis Bilodeau, referring to the decrease in farmers' net income, to the increasing debt-load of farms and to the direct impact of American subsidies. In a substantial memo of about 30 pages, which was presented to the committee, the UPA targets the crisis of net farm income while focusing on the pork and grains sectors, international trade, as well as agricultural and forestry taxation.

Denis Bilodeau urged the Conservative government to change its wall-to-wall approach. He demonstrated that Quebec is a loser in this exercise, having only collected 6.8 per cent of the 2.2 billion dollars dedicated to agriculture in the last federal budget. Because of its level of production, Quebec should have collected almost 18 per cent of this amount. The same can be said of the Options Program for poor farm families, “a welfare program” of which Quebec has only received 6 per cent to date.

“Not only are the projected amounts insufficient in the context of the crisis that we are currently facing, but the formula used to divide the funds between the provinces does not take into account the value of their respective productions. As such, Quebec receives less than half of what it should be getting. This is inconceivable.”

As to international trade, Denis Bilodeau hammered home to the committee members that maintaining supply management is “non-negotiable.”

Abandonment

Friday, the spokesperson of the Bloc Québécois on agriculture and member for Richmond-Arthabaska, André Bellavance, brought the subject back up in the Chamber. After referring to the 6.8 per cent, which Quebec producers received in 2006, via the main support programmes (CAIS), he asked if the government had abandoned grain producers.

“In Quebec, our producers have already received \$135 million,” replied the parliamentary secretary to agriculture and MP for Lotbinière Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, Jacques Gourde. The latter added that producers will receive more than \$300 million by the end of the year.

Producers who want to apply for the Options Program, which aims to help poor farm families, will benefit from a three-week extension to apply. The final application date is set for November 20. Based on their 2005 income declaration, families could obtain a maximum of \$25,000, and individuals could benefit from a maximum of \$15,000. To apply, call 1-800-367-8506 or visit the web site at www.agr.gc.ca/options.

Pierre-Yvon Bégin
LTCN 2006-11-02

Ten-metre buffer strips approved in Nicolet-Yamaska

Nathalie Normandeau, minister of the *Ministère des Affaires Municipales*, has finally accepted the *MRC Nicolet-Yamaska's* interim control by-law (RCI), which prescribes a ten-metre protection strip along all riverbanks within its territory.

The ministry had originally refused the RCI because it was found to be not conforming to government regulations concerning agricultural activities. It had even been described as “abusive and without justification.”

The MRC decided to re-submit its RCI along with new justifications and has recently obtained approval. The prefect, Raymond Bilodeau, explained that the affected zone includes only 3.4 hectares divided among 25 farms, so the impact is minimal. In addition, the MRC has already

confirmed the right to grow perennial plants in this zone. This means that, in reality, the regulation actually prohibits only the tilling of the soil and the spreading of manure. Regarding municipal taxation, the buffer strips, as well as watercourses, benefit from a “taxation differential,” which provides for an evaluation of about \$240 per hectare instead of the normal evaluation of \$9,000 per hectare in the region. Stéphane Nourry, the MRC’s hydrologist, also explained that the notion of variable-width buffer strips based on the risk of erosion were not practical.

The Minister’s decision does require that studies be continued on specific stream bank erosion problems and that research continue to find the best-adapted solutions. This work should then be taken into consideration by the MRC in the final adoption of its land-use planning and development plan in 2007.

Disguised expropriation

Farmers of the *UPA du Centre-du-Quebec* used the term “disguised expropriation” to describe the MRC’s interim control by-law at their annual meeting on October 6. They passed a resolution asking the UPA to oppose any regulations that were more strict than the government’s *Politique de protection des rives, du littoral et des plaines inondables*, which requires three-metre buffer strip.

Jacques Corriveau, the president of the regional federation, fears that the Normandeau’s decision will now serve as a precedent for the rest of Quebec. Apparently, several MRCs are watching the debate closely and have asked for copies of the *MRC Nicolet-Yamaska*’s documents.

It is likely that the debate will continue when the land-use plan is tabled, along with the erosion studies and the research on the best solutions to deal with such problems. It could be shown, for instance, that a permanent wooded buffer strip of a lesser width could be just as good or even more effective than ten metres of hay.

Thierry Larivière
LTCN 2006-11-09

Quebec insures the Oka Abbey will stay agricultural

The payment of three million dollars to the *Corporation de l’abbaye cistercienne d’Oka* has enabled the acquisition of the 270-hectare estate from the Trappist monks, which includes the monastery and a dozen farm buildings in good condition. The corporation now wants to solicit an equal amount from the federal government within the framework of the *Programme d’infrastructures Québec-Municipalité*. In spite of this good news, the agricultural sector of the area remains worried. It is fearful that pressure to de-zone the abbey’s land will start anew should the corporation not find all the required sums it claims to need in order to bring “oxygen” to the “autonomous” operation of the regional entity.

“We can never rest on our laurels,” replied Éric Saint-Denis, when questioned on the guarantees that the local UPA of Deux-Montagnes received for the complete protection of the farm lands. Saint-Denis has only recently become involved with this issue and has only attended one board meeting of the corporation as the UPA representative replacing Jude Lavigne, who has been following the matter since it began in 2003.

The producers are still left with a bitter after-taste following the attempted parcelling out of the property, which would have been undertaken last year by Yvan Patry, the mayor of Oka and interim president of the *Corporation de l'abbaye d'Oka*.

“Yes, we weathered the storm and several people were quite shaken up, but I think that’s behind us now, because this crisis has strengthened us. We have a common vision that all members of the board share,” declared Michel Boisclair, director general of MAPAQ. “The risk will increase over time. If the corporation is not successful in its business plan, the promoters of the incorporation of the estate of the *Parc d'Oka* will go on the offensive again,” worries Lavigne.

Rented land

Currently, the lands of the estate of the Trappist monks are rented out annually, by verbal agreement, to surrounding farmers. According to Michel Boisclair, the corporation does not foresee rental agreements surpassing five to ten years.

Finally, Paule Fortier, president of the *Seigneurie des Mille-Iles* school board (CSSMI), would like to come to an agreement as quickly as possible with the corporation in order to occupy the site and to develop new agricultural projects that would consolidate the agricultural vocation of the land. In this spirit, the CSSMI already uses farm implements from the Trappist farm for its training courses in farm mechanics. Fortier hopes to interest farmers fieldwork apprenticeship and farm building maintenance. In coordination with the *Centre de coordination et d'innovation en alimentation*, which just received a \$300,000 subsidy to promote networking between enterprises, the CSSMI would like to use the kitchen implements of the Trappists to continue apple jelly and sauce production. Moreover, the CSSMI is studying the possibility that the *Centre de formation de Mirabel* invest in the “*Maisons familiales rurales*” program and that it receive students who would live on-site in pursuing their agriculture education.

Denise Proulx
LTCN 2006-11-02

A year of change in Outaouais-Laurentides

After a busy year, with a rezoning and more than 25 per cent new faces on the board, the Fédération de l’UPA Outaouais-Laurentides is bracing itself for its next challenges.

For regional UPA President Richard Maheu, the major issue in Outaouais-Laurentides remains land zoning and management. The area covered by the federation (14 MRCs) does not leave

them much respite. The federation directors have already begun working towards the *Commission sur l'avenir de l'agriculture* (Commission on the Future of Agriculture). “We aren’t going to the Wailing Wall. We’re going to say what we want for the future of agriculture,” warned Maheu. One participant even suggested that each farm in Quebec put up a sign with the slogan “Just like back in Mirabel”. In this area—already hard hit with the expropriation of 1969—the pressure for de-zoning is relentless. In 2006, the *Commission de protection du territoire agricole du Québec* (CPTAQ) refused construction projects for a suburban train station and a bypass lane. Wanting to retain their green zone, delegates were opposed to the implantation of interregional trails for off-road vehicles.

In Outaouais-Laurentides, as in many other regions, 2006 was the year for the tax rebate issue. Judging the new program to be flawed, the assembly demanded the withdrawal of the minimum revenue per evaluation unit in order to be eligible for the municipal and school tax rebates. Always on the subject of taxes, the delegates expressed their concern with the implementation of “abusive water taxation regulations unfavourable to agriculture.” The regulation project on security and circulation norms relative to farm machinery is also a source of preoccupation. The delegates want to be certain that this regulation is acceptable to farmers. Moreover, they denounce the practice of certain municipalities that charge farmers up to \$1,000 for regulation changes to authorize the construction of structure-type buildings with a sealing layer for manure storage.

The assembly also adopted some provincial resolutions such as the one on the Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization Programme (CAIS), mandatory labelling of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), the use of dairy proteins and the import of food products.

On another note, the suspension of dairy quota transactions had repercussions on the regional congress, forcing delegates to debate a last-minute resolution. This resolution demanded that the *Fédération des producteurs de lait du Québec* (FPLQ) consult its members on the changes to come and then to hold a referendum on the issue. Seeing the “discomfort” of several members who did not want to become involved in the affairs of a specialized federation, the resolution was rejected.

Julie Mercier
LTCN 2006-11-02

Pork federation requests a one-year suspension

The *Fédération des producteurs de porcs du Québec* (FPPQ), has resumed the auction’s activities at the American price minus \$16, after a ten-day suspension.

This reopening could be short-lived, however, since the FPPQ has decided to turn to the *Régie des marchés agricoles* to request a one-year suspension for the three auction sale mechanisms. The price would be fixed according to a formula that resembles that of pre-payments (US minus \$1), but which remains to be negotiated. All Quebec pork would then be offered at an equal price

to all slaughterhouses. As a result, the FPPQ has also asked the *Régie* to suspend its deliberations on the marketing agreement since the main clauses would have to be revised.

This is the first element of a three-step plan. The suspension should facilitate an “important deliberation on the part of producers” as to marketing and production models. “We have to see how the producers see themselves in the Canadian restructuring,” says Dominique Blanchard, communications director at the federation. Guests from other provinces and other countries will come to stimulate the producers’ discussions during a forum next January. A tour of regions will follow to discuss the suggestions that will come out of the forum. A complete new plan of action will then be on the agenda for the next annual general assembly. The last step will be to put into place the adopted plan.

Important discussion

The regional tour, which has gotten underway this week, will focus on the three-step plan, which in turn focuses equally on marketing and the production model. The question of collective maternity operations, for example, could be brought up. The scarcity of specialized labour has begun to create problems in several regions. The question of what will replace the current auction format will also need to be addressed.

While awaiting negotiation at the *Régie*, the auction continues to encounter difficulties after the average price plummeted from \$22 to \$24 per 100 kg under the American reference. The residual auction price dropped to \$85 per 100 kg at the beginning of the week, which is \$46 less than the price in the United States. It must be said that the number of pigs awaiting slaughter was still around 20,000 at the beginning of the week. It could then become more advantageous for some producers to sell their pigs directly on the American market. It is difficult to say if a majority of abattoirs will be able to rally around a common proposition for a price formula for the pigs. Those who held many pre-payments might be tempted to stabilize their price in the long term but those who did not hold many could see their price increase compared to the current market.

Thierry Larivière
LTCN 2006-11-02

The FPLQ rethinks its position on quota holdbacks

The planned holdbacks on dairy quota sales took a new direction in Longueuil on November 3. The directors of the *Fédération des producteurs de lait du Québec* unanimously voted to re-open the centralized quota sales system (SCVQ) as of November 20, 2006. Any quota acquired after that date will be subject to a 30 per cent holdback when it is re-sold. In addition, dairy producers will vote regionally next winter on the implementation of a 10 per cent holdback in 2007 on all sales of quota owned before November 20, 2006. This holdback would increase to 20 per cent in 2008 and 30 per cent in 2009. The annual assembly of the FPLQ will finally settle this thorny issue in April 2007.

According to its president, Marcel Groleau, this is a question of re-positioning and not “back-peddling.” “Ontario’s decision to take a different direction has forced the federation to rethink its strategy,” he declared on November 6, 2006. “The debate is on-going and the message that I have been receiving from dairy producers who have contacted me is that it should not stop until something concrete is achieved regarding quota sales.”

The federation has differentiated between old quota and new quota obtained after November 20, 2006. It has decided to apply a 30 per cent holdback on new quota immediately unless it continues to be used on the same production site, as in the case of a family farm transfer. “The objective is clear: it is aimed at limiting the transactions of speculators who are buying and selling quota between farms,” explained Groleau.

A fair return

According to Groleau, the FPLQ’s initial proposal (a 50 per cent holdback on new quota and up to 30 per cent on quota already owned) was not a “test balloon.” “If Ontario had stayed their course, it would have been implemented.” The federation did not yield to pressures from certain dairy-producer groups either. “The pressures are probably greater from producers stating that something concrete must be done regarding quota transactions. Even producers who were against the original proposal share this view.” It was not a question of bowing to opponents’ arguments either. “We were not on the same wavelength as they were. At the heart of our action is the desire to guarantee the future and longevity of the dairy sector.”

According to the FPLQ, these holdbacks should not be seen as theft. “The quota system has been generous to producers when they quit the profession,” explained Groleau. They have benefited from a stable income throughout their career and they leave with a quota that has increased in value more than 100 per cent over the last ten years. The holdbacks are a way to make a contribution to the system in favour of those who remain in production.”

The FPLQ will distribute the holdbacks to all dairy producers, thus contributing to their quality of life and potentially avoiding their having to purchase quota to cover the increased productivity of their herds. Moreover, Groleau added that this outlay is less than that of parents when transferring their dairy operation to their children. In such cases, they forfeit at least 70 per cent of the quota’s value in order to ensure the continuity of the business.

Jean-Charles Gagné
LTCN 2006-11-09

The UPA and Ultramar reach an agreement on Lévis pipeline

Last week, the Ultramar petroleum company and the *Union de producteurs agricoles* signed the agreement relative to the construction of a 245 kilometre pipeline between the Lévis refinery and the East-End Montreal fuel depot. This global-agreement concerns the mitigation measures, the legal aspects and the compensations for agricultural producers who will have to authorize a right-of-way. The responsibility of a final choice for the layout rests with each federation.

“We wanted for producers to be compensated accordingly, but mostly to avoid hindrances to the pursuit of our agricultural activities,” comments the first vice-president of the UPA, Martine Mercier. The Hydro Quebec agreement, concluded several years ago, served as a starting point for the negotiations. Improvements were brought forward and should serve as a basis for projects to come, in the energy field. Incidentally, a study is currently being undertaken in order to lay the foundations for a general negotiating framework.

“We no longer want to negotiate piece-meal for each one of the projects,” states Mercier. “The energy files are increasing in magnitude and, for us, the interest is not in energy but rather on the impact on agriculture and how to protect agricultural land. We took stock of what was done elsewhere, in the case of royalties, for example. There is talk of a 2007 deadline but, at the same time, there is certain urgency to this because we know that Hydro Quebec is going to come along with the need to repair and update its network.”

The global-agreement reached with Ultramar will be presented and explained to the farmers in each federation concerned by this project and will be held in the coming days. Finally, the *Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement* (BAPE) could begin the consultation process by the end of the month.

Rabaska

Among current energy projects, there are the methane carrier ports in Lévis and Cacouna. In the case of the Lévis project, Rabaska, the BAPE indicated last week that the consultation process will begin next December 4. Last week, an information session demonstrated that citizen opposition to the project remains fierce. The disclosure of a notice from the Health ministry brings up several issues.

Rabaska and the town of Lévis have recently announced that they have concluded a second agreement aimed at reforestation and agriculture. Rabaska agreed to compensate for the loss of 18 hectares of woodlot with the reforestation of ten hectares of large plants, and the reforestation of small plants on 18 hectares. Finally, as previously announced, Rabaska has formally committed to rent out land that it purchased but is not currently using to farmers.

Pierre-Yvon Bégin
LTCN 2006-11-02

Agri-Traçabilité Québec is five years old!

Traceability of food products: Quebec has the expertise!

Sylvie Boutin

Information officer

Agri-Traçabilité Québec

It was with great pride that *Agri-Traçabilité Québec* (ATQ) celebrated its fifth anniversary on October 12 in Longueuil, accompanied by farmers, community leaders and business partners. Created in September 2001, ATQ originated from a partnership between farmers and the government to develop, implement and operate a permanent identification and tracing system for agricultural products.

“After five years, it is evident that the term ‘traceability’ is no longer a new word. It has become a normal part of our vocabulary, but more importantly, a part of the daily practice of nearly 19,000 Quebec farmers,” emphasized Richard Maheu, president of ATQ’s board of directors and also of the *Fédération de l’UPA Outaouais-Laurentides*. “I think that we can brag about being pioneers in this field. The various animal health crises that shook up Canadian and North American agriculture over the past three years have proved that we were correct to persevere and implement such a system,” he added.

During the course of the evening, speakers underlined some of the significant accomplishments in the short history of the organization, but also emphasized the fundamental principles of the Quebec traceability system, which are the identification of animals at birth, the identification of all sites or premises that Quebec animals travel through, the recording of all animal movement between sites and finally, a unique database to centralize information for all the products covered by the regulations. Although Quebec was already known for its high-quality expertise in matters relating to food safety and hygiene, the implementation of its identification and tracing system has allowed it to preserve this excellent reputation regarding the quality of its farm produce.

This event could not have taken place without the generous support of several sponsors who participated in ATQ’s fifth birthday celebrations. “This fifth anniversary is a milestone for ATQ, because it reminds us that the Quebec traceability system, one of the best in the world, was developed in a very short time. The rapidity of its implementation is due to the vision and commitment on the part of its founders and administrators. We are proud to be a business partner and at your side for this important day. Happy anniversary to ATQ and its personnel!” declared Philippe Dubouix, CEO of the Allflex Group, a major sponsor of the event.

Also present for the evening’s celebration, as a business partner and major sponsor of the fifth anniversary, were representatives from Syscan International. As stated by its president, Alex Striefler, “For the last several years, Syscan has been working closely with ATQ on one of the most important mandates ever given to Quebec agriculture. Thanks to the leadership and vision of those involved and the coordination at both the farm and the transportation level, the traceability and locating system, based on radio frequency identification technology (RFID) developed by our company, will place Quebec agriculture among the leaders internationally.

From our perspective, the last few years have been hard work, but also stimulating and passionate work. I wish to re-confirm the common vision that our team shares with *Agri-Traçabilité Québec*, that is to contribute our know-how to the successful implementation of agricultural traceability in Quebec.”

ATQ has often been called upon to present Quebec’s expertise at national and international conferences and to participate in various projects with other organizations regarding permanent identification and traceability of agricultural products. During the October 12 evening festivities, the executive director of ATQ, Linda Marchand, announced the creation of a new body, *Agri-Traçabilité International* (ATI), which will have the mandate to promote the traceability expertise developed in Quebec.

In conclusion, it should be noted that ATQ is a not-for-profit, autonomous organization, founded in September 2001 to develop and put into place a permanent identification and traceability system for Quebec agricultural products, whether of animal or vegetable origin. Its board of directors is made up of representatives from the *Union des producteurs agricoles* (UPA), the *Ministère de l’Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l’Alimentation du Québec* (MAPAQ) and the *Financière Agricole du Québec* (FADQ).

The 2006 census of established young farmers is underway

Participate, because you count!

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Yvon Vallières, has announced that the first census of established young farmers is underway! The department has undertaken this vast operation—which meshes with its Youth Policy—with the support of its numerous partners, including the *Union des producteurs agricoles* (UPA), the *Fédération de la relève agricole du Québec* (FRAQ), *La Coop fédérée* and *La Financière agricole du Québec*.

The purpose of the census is to create a complete databank based on reliable information that will enable the department to direct its action and support efficiently.

Within the next few days, all owners of Quebec agri-businesses under age 40 will be invited to answer a brief questionnaire that has been mailed to them. They may complete the questionnaire directly on paper or use the electronic version found at www.mapaq.gouv.qc.ca/recensement.

If you own at least one per cent of the shares of an agri-business, are under age 40, and have not yet received the census questionnaire, please phone (1 888 222-MAPA [6272]) or e-mail (politique.jeunesse@mapaq.gouv.qc.ca) us to ask for the document.

Join the many other young farmers who have contributed to this initiative. Your participation is essential to the success of the operation.

To find out more about the census of established young farmers, or for help in completing the questionnaire, go to www.mapaq.gouv.qc.ca/recensement to contact the Youth Policy team directly.

"I'm proud to point out that young members of the MAPAQ staff were involved in creating the posters for the census. This shows that there is great interest in this file within the Department. The same can be said of all our partners. Sincere thanks to them all," said Minister Vallières .