

& OPEN FORUM

ATTRACTING FARMERS | APAS STUDY

Wanted: new entrants to farming biz

The following is an excerpt from a report by consultant Al Scholz, commissioned by the Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan, to investigate the need to attract new entrants to farming

The objective of this study was to provide an overview of the intergenerational transfer, new entrant attraction and immigration programs offered across Canada with recommendations for Saskatchewan.

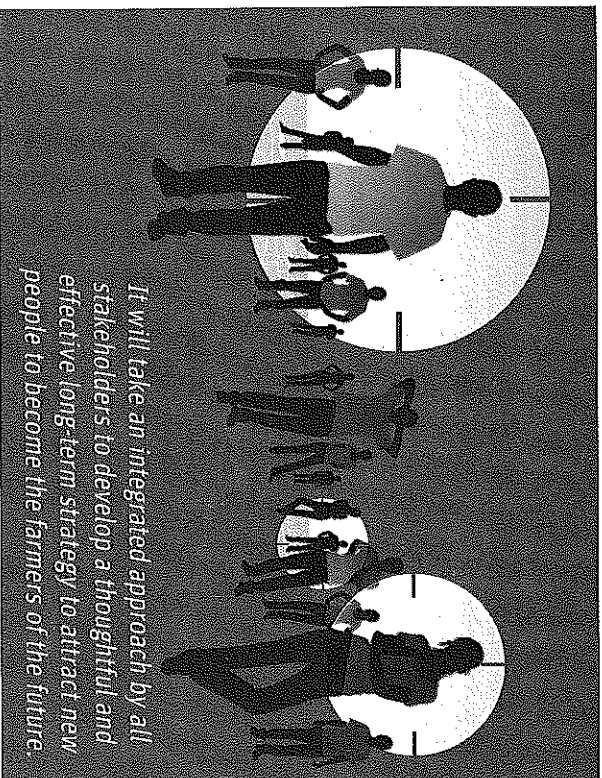
It became obvious, early in the study, that there are no quick solutions evident in the existing new entrants programs across Canada or internationally.

Improving the atmosphere and climate to attract new entrants to primary farm production is a complex and long-term process....

Evidence from previous program evaluations indicates that the more successful programs provide incentives and support for business training and succession planning, which pays long-term dividends over a life time, rather than using direct financial grants, which can distort the marketplace.

Beginning farmer programs with financial assistance have had mixed results. Low interest financial support for land and equipment tends to be a one-shot approach and is usually capitalized into land or other assets with little long-term impact.

The magnitude of the need for new entrants to replace retiring farmers is



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illusive. Some farm leaders believe it is an urgent need and others feel the situation will resolve on its own.

Nevertheless, the average age of farmers is increasing and the number of new entrants is declining.

Saskatchewan is one of the few provinces in Canada that does not have a specific program aimed at supporting beginning farmers within the ministry of agriculture. This is an opportunity to start with fresh ideas and programs.

There are opportunities for Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan, as the province's general farm organization, to work with the Saskatchewan ministry of agriculture to develop new entrant programs — the right kind of programs that are cost-efficient and effective and that make a positive difference.

While the need for action is apparent to the agricultural industry, other

groups are lobbying for governments to be good stewards of the public purse and support the economy only where necessary, plus there are concerns about a growing provincial deficit and pressure to reduce spending in the current and upcoming budgets.

The agriculture and food sector is also changing quickly, driven by new global competitors, trade restrictions, climate change and consumer demands for (local) foods that are safe, healthy and nutritious. It will be important for new entrants to have the business skills and marketing abilities to adapt to continuous change to be successful.

In the past, there was a general belief that farming was the best option for those who couldn't finish high school or do anything else, whereas today, the skill sets and competencies required of a success-

ful farmer are astounding and surpass the capabilities of many professions.

The entry skill sets required of a beginning farmer are much higher today. Government and industry support programs must help attain the required business skill sets as the first priority.

Recommendations to governments for policy changes and programs must anticipate the needs of the industry five years or 10 from now.

If new inter-generational or new entrant attraction programs were planned and initiated in April 2010, it will take several years for tangible results to flow out of the pipeline.

Therefore, the needs five or 10 years forward must be anticipated, rather than developing programs on the needs of today that are based on the past five years experience.

While attracting new entrants to farming has been identified as a near crisis situation, there is a leadership gap in addressing the challenge.

Who takes the lead? Another way to ask the question is "who has the most to gain or lose in farm ownership transfer?"

Government has a role in policy and legislation but it is only one of several key stakeholders.

Industry itself must take leadership responsibility to meet the challenge and to seek solutions.

There is no silver bullet to attracting new entrants of all ages to agriculture. Unfortunately, the findings did not identify one solution or even two solutions.

It will take an integrated approach by all stakeholders to develop a thoughtful and effective long-term strategy to attract new people to become the farmers of the future.

PATRONIZING THE CO-OP | FCL BUILT IN PART BY LITTLE OLD LADIES

Farmers helped build co-operatives and still support them

Randall Miller is a producer from Landis, Sask., with views

on Saskatchewan's co-operative roots, co-op patronage and a youth spent eating overripe bananas

What do soggy red tomatoes and half-black bananas have to do with oil

upgraders? Well, as a young guy growing up in rural Saskatchewan, I was always taken aback by some of the produce my mother would bring home from our local Co-op store.

When we asked her why, she would say "well, someone has to buy it. It's our store and we have to help them out for the good of all."

It never made sense to me. I couldn't stand the look, let alone the

flavour, but whoever was supposed to be taking care of business obviously wasn't.

However, from my mother and a countless bunch of rural folk like her, came a staid and stronger local Co-op, Credit Union and Saskatchewan Wheat Pool elevator, and hence a very strong Federated Co-operatives Limited.

It was never a big deal in the cities, where they saw themselves as just a little too cosmopolitan for a lefey group like a Co-op.

But as many farmers retired to the cities, they took their preferences for Co-op canned goods and case lot sales and demand with them, which more than anything was the driving force for more and bigger service centres in the city.

The most enjoyable thing for me, as someone who lived in Alberta 30 years ago, is how FCL has made great strides in providing service in that considerably right-of-centre province.

FCL bought a great produce com-

pany with their collective pennies extracted from the socially minded people in the rest of Canada and now own The Grocery People Ltd. of Edmonton, a prudent buy.

The people in Calgary don't much think about where this company's roots are, or much care. They know it holds some of the top retail convenience spots in the city, and if you use Crowchild Trail as an example, it has three progressively larger service centres as you move to the northwest of Calgary.

The question is not whether they are doing well or right by pioneers. I believe they are. But without the persistent support of a few, it may never have happened at all.

In many communities in Saskatchewan, these farmers were in groups jokingly known as "Red Squares."

Today they have kicked it up a notch with the heavy oil upgrader and refinery they built and run with some provincial and most certainly provincial tomato buyers' help.

FCL generates and throws off such

an increasingly embarrassing profit that some of the management and staff are remunerated to a degree that is very comfortable, exceeding many like jobs in government and the private sector.

What is lost on any merchant is the fact that the public are fickle, and when they turn on you, and in this case it would be away from you, your business intentions mean very little — except for little old Saskatchewan ladies who buy rain or shine at the local Co-op.

This is still well represented in local support as you drive through Salmon Arm, B.C., where again, because of the strong presence of ex-prairie farm men and women, the lumber mills of FCL have a strong presence, albeit down-sized from times past.

Perhaps they have forgotten just what a strong contribution this forestry business made to our building of quality lumber for houses and out-buildings.

It may be the right time for a dividend on ripe fruit and vegetables.

Grandin tells students that words can get in the way

EDITORIAL NOTEBOOK



BARB GLEN

Grandin's life is the subject of an HBO movie

There are few speakers one would want to listen to all day. Temple Grandin is one of them. She plunges into her topic, speaks forcefully, and is so knowledgeable that it's mesmerizing to an interested audience.

The acknowledged international expert on livestock handling facilities visited the Western College of Veterinary Medicine Jan. 16 for a lecture on her favourite topic: understanding livestock behaviour.

Grandin is a professor of animal science at Colorado State University and author of several books, the most recent of which are *Animals in Transition* and *Animals Make Us Human*. Herrnstein is likely known to anyone even remotely interested in livestock handling. She speaks all over the world, has designed livestock facilities and patented humane livestock handling facilities that McDonald's now requires for its meat suppliers.

In her trademark western shirt and neckerchief, Grandin told WCVM students about livestock and how they perceive their world.

She credits her autism with her ability to visualize in the same way that animals do, which enables her to design facilities that suit livestock production purposes.

"The animal world is a whole world of sensory-based detail," she told students. "What I want you to do is get away from language" and truly observe animal behaviour. Her slides and her entertaining lecture elaborated on that theme.

Grandin's world renown led HBO to produce a movie about her life, simply titled *Temple Grandin*. It will air on HBO Feb. 6 with Claire Danes playing the title role.

Grandin consulted on the movie and on Saturday joked about the project. "It's like a really, really weird time machine."

In an interview with *Meatingplace*, a newsletter for the meat industry, HBO Films president Len Amato commented on the movie.

"Our film focuses on an amazing woman and the road she's traveled during her lifetime," he said. "The fact that she works in the meat industry was just one aspect of our story, but we took Temple's lead in her belief that people are not going to stop eating meat anytime soon, so it's our responsibility to treat livestock humanely."