

The Editorial Page

The AgriNews is dedicated to covering and promoting agriculture, one of Eastern Ontario's most important economic sectors.

Editorial

Food or fuel?

The Grain Farmers of Ontario believe a new study they commissioned has resolved the debate over what their products should primarily be used for, food or fuel.

Conveniently – and logically – the answer is... both.

How the debate ever got legs in the first place is beyond us. It always seemed obvious that both the food and fuel markets were legitimate destinations for plentiful Ontario corn and other grains.

Yet, the ethics of selling those grains into fuel production when millions of people were starving around the world became a sizeable and controversial issue.

There really is no issue, says Stittsville's Don Kenny, chairman of the GFO. That's because Kenny's corn yields – and he's typical – have increased by 35 per cent since he started farming in 1975 and he's confident new products and technologies will ensure his family supplies both the local livestock feed market and the ethanol plant at Johnstown for many years to come.

The study reminds us how valid fuel is as a major use for corn. With just five per cent ethanol in regular gasoline, Canadians are reducing greenhouse emissions by 2.3 million tonnes annually. And the five per cent blending has lowered annual family gas expenditures by more than \$100.

Meanwhile, food demands around the world are growing by 1.1 per cent annually. Happily, the study reveals global grain production has increased by 1.5 per cent over the past 20 years.

With increasing resources being directed to agricultural development in some of the world's hungriest countries, the study notes, it appears likely crop production will continue to increase where the need is greatest.

To the GFO, it was a relief to confirm through the study that production of biofuels makes such a positive contribution to the environment without any notable impact on overall food prices and the world's ability to supply food.

The bottom line is that the abundance of grain grown by farmers around the world, including in Ontario, can both successfully protect the environment and feed the world.

End of debate!

Up the creek

In the provincial government's mad rush to introduce high-priced solar and wind energy into farm country, there seems to be a tendency to block or at least overlook the power source that got us here... hydro.

Since settlement days, water harnessed along streams and rivers and used to crank power-generating turbines has been the backbone of industry and the main conduit of electricity into our homes.

The government has introduced many incentives to kick start trendy wind and solar "farms". But what of the lowly hydro dams and private generating stations they supply?

While there are some modest incentives for hydro power, the case of Casselman's Dr. Guy Laplante seems to suggest they're largely offset by what the dentist refers to as "green tape".

In 1986, Laplante was among the first operators in Ontario to establish a hydro generator to sell electricity to the grid. At the time, there was broad political support and the bonus of cash incentives.

Flash forward 25 years and Laplante has been held up for 18 months in trying to upgrade his turbine and powerhouse on the South Nation River to deliver more electricity for general consumption... something the province is encouraging.

The problem? As in so many of these situations, the political masters have decreed an alternative energy strategy and, instead of expediting the assignment, the overlapping public servants are putting Laplante through the ringer on the details.

They don't like the temporary coffer dams Laplante installed to hold back water while he does the upgrade; they fret over a few trapped fish – released by a biologist at a cost of \$1,000 to Laplante – they're probably going to charge him big time to monitor American eels which are hardly ever seen at Casselman, they want studies and more studies, some costing \$3,500 each... they're even threatening to charge him under natural resources legislation and tie him up even further.

Meanwhile, Laplante's contractor is poised to pull the plug because of the delays and engineering fees that have doubled in the interim.

South Nation Conservation, which has a large stake in the river at Casselman, including the weir feeding Laplante's intake channel, will try to get all the regulators together and move this project along, says General Manager Dennis O'Grady.

The sooner the better... before the ever patient Laplante throws in the towel and a valid source of alternative energy goes down the drain.

AgriGab

Hospitality, not history

It's clean, it's functional with flair, it's America's number two banking centre, it even has impressive street art... but where's the history?

That's what I found myself wondering over and over again during a three-day visit to Charlotte, North Carolina, early in April. When it comes to Civil and Revolutionary War history on display, Charlotte is sadly lacking.

I really believed there'd be more war remnants in downtown Charlotte, the NASCAR capital of the U.S. Instead, it looks like it was given a complete makeover in recent years, ridding it of most historic buildings, except for a handful of churches.

But what the heck! I wasn't there to immerse myself in history. I was there for my first ever North American Farm Show Council meeting and, as it turned out, my last NAFSC meeting.

That's not because this representative of the Ottawa Valley Farm Show was turfed out of the council. It's because pretty much the first item of business was to streamline the organization's name and modernize the logo.

It's now known simply as the Farm Show Council, a 25-member group representing many of the continent's leading recurring agricultural expositions, including the OVFS and three other Canadian productions.

A majority of members in attendance decided that reserving the "North American" portion strictly for

internal and legal use provided a much grabbier public name for advertising and promotional purposes.

At the same time, they felt that replacing the logo which had served the council since it was formed in Chicago almost 40 years ago would also provide a more effective, more contemporary promotional tool. The new logo shows a flowing green field with a plant rising from it; the old logo depicted crops, livestock and machinery inside a circle.

Another reason given to drop the "North American" portion is that the council has expanded beyond the continent with the addition of New Zealand as a member.

Rotating its annual meetings around the U.S. and Canada, the Farm Show Council is currently chaired by Canadian Doug Wagner, vice-president of Canada's Outdoor Farm Show at Woodstock. Other Canadian members include the International Plowing Match, and the Western Canada Farm Progress Show.

Funded through membership and annual meeting dues, the council's objective is to improve the value of member shows through education, communication and evaluation. It aims to provide the best possible marketing showcase for exhibitors of agricultural equipment and related products.

In order to continuously maintain high standards among members, applicants are evaluated before admission to the council and then again on a continuing five-year plan. The written evaluations are performed by fellow members, several of whom reported to the Charlotte meeting; all the shows assessed in the latest round were accepted for continued admission in the council.

In addition to the evaluations, council members share advertising, exchange ideas, present what went right and wrong at their respective shows, and host speakers such as Ottawa's Fred Fox, executive director of the Exhibitor Institute, who addressed members on how to help create more knowledgeable and successful exhibitors... something clearly in the best interest of the shows. A second speaker addressed the merit of Facebook as a farm show tool.

Among gripes bounced around the table were the exorbitant boosting of hotel rack rates at farm show

time, exhibitors who insist on pulling out before the end of a show, and requests for official invitations to a show by sometimes dubious international visitors.

IPM general manager Cathy Lasby said the biggest problem now facing her rotating event is the growing legion of inspectors from every department imaginable who make it increasingly difficult to run the show.

She cited last year's IPM at St. Thomas where a retired inspector alerted a colleague to the traditional bird's-eye-view cherry picker rides offered by Hydro One. The attraction had to be cancelled when the inspector deemed it required an amusement park ride license... something impossible to get on short notice.

It wasn't all business. Not only did I get to check out an excellent funk band in a dark little bar called the Double Door a short cab ride from the hotel, two group dinners were held, one at the King's Kitchen, a non-profit restaurant featuring local cuisine whose proceeds are used to help the city's homeless population, and a pig pickin' barbecue at the elegant home of David Zimmerman of Charlotte-based Southern Shows Inc.

Little in the way of history, perhaps... but the Southern hospitality more than made up for it.



by Tom VanDusen

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