



## Reflecting on 30 years



## of County farming

By Jack Evans

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PICTON — You can take the man out of the job but you can't take the job out of the man.

After 30 years as an agricultural representative, including the past 25 in Prince Edward County, Larry Matheson can go on pension with the provincial government's decision to close several agricultural offices across Ontario — including his.

At age 52, Matheson isn't quite ready for retirement yet. "I hope to remain involved with the farming community here for applications and forms and other services," he said as he neared the end of his job.

But he remains surprised that the ministry decided to close three area agricultural offices. "I thought probably Picton would go, but not Stirling," he said.

But after many years in Picton, he's

prepared to stay where he and his family call home.

Over his years in the County, Matheson has witnessed many of the lights go out on country roads across Prince Edward County. When he came in 1971, there were some 400 or more dairy farm operations in the County. An early morning scene in either winter or summer would see twinkles of barn lights at regular times for early-day milkings. Now, there are only about 120 active producers, says Matheson. "But the total volume of milk produced is up."

He attributes much of that to sophisticated feeding methods. "Most are feeding stored feed all year round instead of mixing stored feed with pasture. There are a lot of new silos."

The face of horticulture, or the growing of crops, has also changed. The dozen or so canneries and food processors of the early 1970s has dwindled down to one frozen food processor at Wellington. Tomatoes, squash, pumpkins and several

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other crops are no longer of significance, except for roadside stands and pick-your-own operations, both of which have grown.

The closing of the federal research station at Smithfield was another blow to county horticulture, representing the loss of a valuable resource.

Several major swine producers which once spanned the county are now all but gone. But sheep producers have increased markedly, including several major operators. "They are a progressive group," said Matheson.

"Wheat, corn and soybean acreages are up sharply, and along with that, the

size of machinery has increased tremendously. A 100-horsepower tractor was unheard of when I first came here.

"Conservation tillage and no-till have also found increasing favor among local farmers."

"I have a lot of good memories here," said Matheson of his decades of dealings with the local farm community. As a settled-in resident of the County, he has also been active for many years in the Rotary Club of Picton, including a term as president.

But he also enjoyed connections with many farm groups, most of which met regularly at the agricultural office, which leads him to wonder where such meetings will be held in the future as the groups are still active.

While Matheson qualified for early retirement, three other regular staffers are simply out of jobs, he lamented. They are Stephen Clare, soil and crop specialist; Patti Stacey, office manager; and Lynn Ellis, part-time secretary.

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