

A Herald feature

The many faces of Halton farming

Pressures from industry and the growing urban-oriented population tend to make us forget that agriculture was once the number one industry in Halton Hills. As part of a series on Halton Hills

agriculture, Herald staff writer Maggie Hannah spoke with residents of three area farms to find out why they continue to pursue their centuries old career

Hay raiser quit factory job to begin 'shoestring' farming

Farming may be hard, low paying work but Ray and Lorna Schindler find it satisfying enough to be worth the sacrifices they have had to make in the four years since they began.

Mr. Schindler came to Canada from Germany as a child of eight. His parents settled in Oakville and his exposure to farming began when he took a summer job on a farm at the age of 16. He handled 60,000 bales of hay that summer and milked 54 of the meanest, most vicious cows he's ever met so that he swore when he left if he ever saw a farm again it would be too soon.

"They'd kick you, bite you, step on you," he says. "They'd do anything they could to get at

you. I really hated them."

Later he worked for a second farmer and found the cattle not nearly so bad, but the man didn't teach him anything.

After working nearly two years in a factory in Milton he went to work for Halstein breeder Hugh Beatty and from him learned everything he's now applying to his own farm.

BACKGROUND
Mrs. Schindler had more of an agricultural background but wasn't involved with dairy farming during her youth. Her father was a Department of Agriculture horticulturalist and she lived in rural Manitoba until her family moved to Milton when she was in her mid-teens.

"It was a real culture shock

to come from a very rural, home-oriented community to the highly industrialized, almost sophisticated lifestyle we found in Milton," she chuckles. "That may seem exaggerated because it's only a small town but it really was very different to the community I was used to in Manitoba."

She found living in town too restricted and says she's "like a bird in a cage" at her job as a library assistant at Milton High School.

Mr. Schindler works at Krohnert's in Milton manufacturing the bulk tanks truckers use for picking up milk on dairy farms for transport to the dairy.

OUTSIDE JOBS
The Schindlers feel that any

couple starting from scratch, as they have, may both have to work away from the farm for at least four or five years. By that time they should be able to build up some sort of base allowing the place to carry its own financial load.

The Schindlers started on a shoe string. A man they knew offered them 50 acres of land rent free. In return for taking care of some trees which he had planted on the property they could plant whatever crops they wished and do what they wished with what they harvested.

They bought a tractor and a seed drill, both used, and set to work.

"The first crop we put in was no hell," Mr. Schindler admits with a grin, "but at least we got something."

They then began looking for a farm to rent and were interviewed along with 16 other couples when their present farm on the Ninth Line just above Derry Road became available. Their landlord is the Ministry of Government Services and they freely admit they couldn't do as well as they do if they weren't paying relatively low rent for their 153 acres including a house and barn.

NO QUOTA
They went to the interview with a letter of credit from their Milton bank manager for a specific sum, which they hoped would enable them to buy a few cows and some machinery. They got the farm but their dream of setting up a dairy farm fell flat when the Ontario Milk Marketing Board refused to allow any more quota transfers.

"They had been giving quota transfers all along if a farmer went out of business," Mr. Schindler says, "but all of a sudden they said 'no' and there was no way we could get any quota to start shipping milk." That might have stopped some prospective farmers, but not this pair. They went right ahead and bought a couple of cows and began milking anyway and cash cropping. As Mr. Schindler saw it he could just as easily test out his theories and abilities at handling two dairy cows as on two dozen.

"If I couldn't do it well and I lost them I decided I'd rather lose two than 30," he explains, "so we went ahead and bought two cows from Hugh Beatty and I got into the routine of milking and feeding and doing my chores."

TWO COWS
They got amazed comments from many people who couldn't see the point of going through all the work including hauling water to the cows in the winter because the barn was too cold to allow for piped water for just two cows. Their persistence paid off a year ago when they finally got a quota of 90,000 pounds of milk annually. This is equal to what six good cows could produce on a regular daily basis, Mr. Schindler says.

Their first milk pick-up was 83 pounds, Mr. Schindler says. Now, with a lot of effort and a lot of travelling, to find what they wanted they have 18 cows and enough quota to go with them. They ship about 1,000 pounds of milk per pick up (every other day).

Mr. Schindler says he has bought only two brand new pieces of equipment since he set up. One was a tractor and the other was a baler. Everything else is second-hand.

"I did pretty well in the shops and technical courses I took at school," he says, "and I've had a lot of experience at fixing things. I think tinkering with machinery to make it work comes a little easier to me than it does to some other people."

A recent survey of farmers' sons shows that they feel they couldn't start up from scratch without outside help, even if they had \$200,000 capital to invest, Mr. Schindler says. The Schindler started on \$40,000 from the bank.

MAKING PROGRESS
A breakdown of their past three years' expenses shows that they are making progress,



Lorna and Ray Schindler

although they aren't out of the red yet.

"The first year we spent about \$28,000 to make \$4,000," Mr. Schindler says. "The next year we only lost about \$17,000. Last year, it dropped to \$12,000 and this year I expect it to be \$7,000 or \$8,000. Lorna doesn't like me to say how much we've lost."

"Well I don't see it as a loss," Mrs. Schindler says. "Getting our quota has made all the difference in the world. We had to buy a lot of things for the barn last year - more cows, our quota, a bulk tank. We haven't really lost it. It's all out there invested."

The Schindlers hope to buy their own farm in the next few years, but are resigned to the

fact that it will be north or west of Halton by quite a few miles. They hope they can buy a farm operation as it stands where their own cows will pay the mortgage and they can just take over new cows and quota and use that to carry on as if they were old, experienced farmers.

Land in the greenbelt section of Halton where their present farm is located is worth \$3,000 to \$4,000 an acre. Across the road in Peel where the zoning is for small industries it's worth \$50,000 an acre. Land in the Chatham, London area and north from Orangeville is running around \$1,000 an acre, the Schindlers say.

Mr. Schindler would like to rent an extra 150 acres so he

could cash crop as a sideline or add about 10 cows and the necessary milk quota to go with them. Either way he could quit his outside job and become a full-time farmer.

The Schindlers had trouble getting bank loans because they were considered high risk. They would loan to other people in similar circumstances ahead of them if they had farming experience, Mr. Schindler says. They can't go to the Young Farmers Credit Bureau either because they aren't buying their land. When they do find a place to buy, then they may go to them, he explains, because they help young farmers get established by co-signing bank loans for those they deem responsible

enough to back. "They don't actually loan you the money," he explains. "They just co-sign the note after they investigate you and decide you're suitable, and that means the government is backing the loan in case anything goes wrong. It gives the bank better security."

Farming is the only business where you can go the competition for help and get it, the Schindlers feel. They say their neighbors have been a big help with practical advice, as well as extra hands in an emergency.

The Schindlers have a neighbors' son helping them and refer to him as an "assistant junior agricultural industrialist - Brad for short."



John McNabb

Advances in nutrition change dairy farming

Fantastic advances in animal nutrition are probably the biggest change in dairy farming in recent years, according to one of Halton's top Guernsey breeders.

When John McNabb bought his original 75-acre farm (Lot 7, Con. 8) in 1949, the horse was already a thing of the past and most of the present farm equipment was in existence. While the machines may have been enlarged and refined the rudiments were there thirty years ago.

The farm today consists of 87 acres which they own on Trafalgar Road and another 135 which they rent. The McNabbs run about 60 head of cattle of which 28 are milking.

The McNabbs have been showing cattle for the past 10 or 12 years on a continuing basis, although Mr. McNabb says he first began showing the stock while he was still at home farming with his father. They have had the champion cow for its breed at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair the past two years and took top money at the Sale of Stars two years ago with one of their animals. This year, they intend to exhibit at the Canadian National Exhibition.

GLOSSY RIBBONS
Those glossy ribbons make a big difference when it comes to selling stock, Mr. McNabb says, and that is the main reason they go to the work of exhibiting.

The change from milk cans to bulk tanks came in 1957 and has proven to be "the greatest thing that ever happened" in the dairy industry despite the doom and gloom predictions of

the time, Mr. McNabb says. Tank trucks visit the farm every second day to pick up the milk he has stored in his own bulk tank and transport it to a dairy for processing. The old system saw farmers storing the milk in heavy cans which were cooled in icy water and picked up daily by a trucker for transport to a dairy. The trucks were not insulated and there was no method of loading the trucks except by muscle and manpower.

ALLOTTED QUOTA
The Milk Marketing Board, which was set up in the late 1960s, draws less enthusiastic comments from Mr. McNabb. When the board was first established, farmers who were already shipping milk to a dairy were allotted a quota equal to the daily amount they were shipping.

For people trying to get into the business, however, it was different. They had to locate industrial quota and ship at that rate for a time before they could get any grade one quota. Grade one quota is allotted as pounds per day which a farmer can ship, while industrial quota is sold thousands of pounds per year. Price for grade one quota is higher than for industrial milk.

Mr. McNabb admits that being able to share equipment with his father and brother when he first began, and later with a brother-in-law after his own family moved away, helped him to set up his farm without too large a debt hanging over him. He says he bought things gradually and increased his herd a bit at a time although he had to buy

some cows in 1967 when he changed to the bulk tank.

Now, each farmer does his own work and sharing is much less common than it was years ago. His son Ken, who has just graduated in agricultural science from the Ontario Agricultural College at Guelph, is working on the farm with his father now.

BETTER CROP
"His whole idea is to grow a better crop and better animals," Mr. McNabb says. "They learn a lot of practical things at college."

Mr. McNabb himself is not a college grad. In fact, he had to quit school when he graduated from the eighth grade because during the depression there was no such thing as transportation to high school and certainly no one could afford to board in town just to go to school.

Mrs. McNabb, a public school teacher, says she neither worked in the fields nor learned to milk, although she did help with the chickens. "We kept 400 to 600 chickens upstairs in the barn," Mr. McNabb says. "They were important in getting us going. We kept a few pigs too. These days a farmer couldn't do that unless he kept them in separate buildings. He'd have the health authorities after him."

The McNabbs also grow hay, oats, barley, wheat and corn. Their younger daughter, Marilyn, will enter the Ontario College of Agriculture this fall to take the same course as her brother, but with a major in economics. Their elder daughter works in Ottawa.

Off-season is no holiday for Halton's cash croppers

Cash crop farmers don't fit the traditional farm pattern as depicted in cliché farm situations in school literature and children's stories of grandfather's farm.

One difference is they keep no livestock and for another they may not own their own land.

Ed Segsworth of RR2 Milton has been a cash cropper for 15 years although he says he has only gone into it in a big way during the past two years.

He owns 55 acres on Walker's Line just west of Milton and rents 700 acres within a 10-mile radius. The government owns much of the land through one agency or another but some of the land is held by speculators.

SEASONAL
Mr. Segsworth says cash croppers often work longer hours and are just as tied down as dairy farmers. The difference lies in the fact that their work is seasonal running from mid to late April, depending on the weather, until the beginning of December. The off season is no holiday, however, since that's when machinery must be repaired and readied for the following year. It is also the time when stored crops are hauled to market.

One of the tricks of making cash cropping work is learning to budget, he says, since the cash flow is not steady in that type of farming.

"People often ask me how on earth we budget for a whole year at a time when they have trouble stretching a pay cheque from one week to the next," he chuckles. His answer is "very carefully."

Mr. Segsworth has 475 acres of grain corn, 175 acres of wheat and the rest of his land in barley this year. He says Halton is a good market area for his crops since places like St. Lawrence Starch will buy his wheat and corn and he can also sell it for use in feed at places like the mills in Milton.

The Ontario Wheat Producers Marketing Board is the only one applicable to his crops at present although he says corn producers are toying with the idea of setting up some

type of board. All wheat is sold through the board.

"Farming used to be regarded as a life style rather than a business," Mr. Segsworth says. "But not any more. Now it is not only a business but a high finance business at that. While it used to run year to year farms now require long term investment. If a farmer goes to the bank for a loan he'll be regarded just as any other businessman and his collateral and past performance at repaying loans will play a part in the decision to grant or withhold a loan."

Mr. Segsworth says he is in the process of forming a partnership with his brother-in-law which will help with the workload. He also has a neighbor's son hired to do odd jobs like cultivating, discing and cutting grass which he hasn't time to fit into his daily routine. Helping neighbors in an emergency is still part of farm life although each farmer is more independent than was the case in the past.

Although Mr. Segsworth grows no hay now he says he would like to get into it. Planting corn on the same land year after year isn't good for the heavier soils in his area. Nor is it good for the corn crop. He would like to rotate the corn with a legume crop like hay which would help to replace the nutrients removed by the corn but he hasn't enough land to do it. He feels he would need about 1,200 acres for that.

Short term leases from landlords also play havoc with such plans.

LONGER LEASES
"We can't get long enough leases on the land," he says, "and as a result all that's happening is we're mining the land. We would need to know we had the land for a long enough period to make it a worthwhile investment before we could rotate crops the way we should. When we only have X dollars to spend we have to grow what will return us the most money for our investment."

"If we could get 10 or 12 year leases we could rotate into legume crops and rebuild the



Ed Segsworth

land. The way it is we might only get the land rebuilt and someone else would come along and outbid us for the land and all our investment would go to the next farmer. We can't afford that but that's something a lot of people don't understand. They don't think growing crops can hurt the soil. Absentee landlords aren't interested in maintaining let alone rebuilding the soil. All they're interested in is making money."

Mr. Segsworth has yearly, three-year and five-year lease on various properties.

Mr. Segsworth is not an Ontario Agricultural College graduate nor has he taken extension courses in agriculture. He was born on a dairy farm about 10 miles south of his present home and says his knowledge has come from "on

the job training."

He is a member of the newly formed agricultural advisory board which has been set up to bring agricultural problems to the attention of regional council.

Mr. Segsworth agreed that farmers have no voice on council now since none of the councillors have an agricultural background. He just smiled when asked if a farmer would get elected if he were to run since he has so many non-farm residents in rural Halton. He pointed out that most farmers don't have the time to attend the numerous meetings a councillor is expected to attend and added that most farmers "are not prepared to play the games a politician plays. When they see something that needs doing they get on with doing it."