

## Features

# No farmers, No food, No future

By LISA BOONSTOPPEL-POT  
The Herald

An active farm organization leader and member has a message to deliver, but he isn't using Canada Post - he's boldly presenting his message on a sign placed prominently on his front lawn.

It reads, 'Just think, no farmer, no food, no future' in big, black letters which are read by hundreds of motorists travelling on Winston Churchill Boulevard where Harry Brander has farmed for several years.

"People say there is a recession now, but farmers have been in a recession for 10 years," said Mr. Brander, "and the last two years have been particularly bad for the agricultural industry."

"Through the sign, I'm trying to get people thinking about farmers and what would happen if there were no farmers. Where would our food come from if there were no farmers?" said Mr. Brander. "We'd have to rely on other countries which would be costly."

He's concerned how uncompetitive subsidies, the United States effect on our farm industry and the vicious circle of hard times are taking their toll on farmers.

Mr. Brander admitted he's worried about the success of his own 200 acre beef operation and if he'll still be farming in 10 years.

"The most important thing we need is a fair price for our product," said Mr. Brander. He says government subsidies don't meet the farmer's cost of production.

At a time when subsidies incite negative public opinion, this statement could earn Mr. Brander more animosity than sympathy for his message, but he says the public is misinformed about agricultural subsidies.

"Subsidies are a lot lower than the media says they are and are much lower than subsidies the States and European Common Market give their farmers," he said. "The European Community (EC) and the States subsidize

their farmers by huge rates and our treasury can't compete. The GATT talks were supposed to decrease these subsidy payments but that didn't happen."

Receiving a higher price for their market produce makes the EC and USA strong agricultural forces which means bad news for Canadian producers. "The USA is 10 times bigger than us so if they send only one per cent of their products over here, it affects us by 10 per cent."

"On the other hand, if we send 10 per cent of our products over there, they'll only be affected by one per cent," said Mr. Brander.

Because of the huge effect the States has on product prices, Mr. Brander says farmers can't get market value for their wares and rely on farm subsidies to survive.

Stiff competition and the high interest rate on borrowed money are other factors that make it extremely difficult for farmers to survive and want to stay in the industry, he said.

Earnings for farmers have gone down 22 per cent or by seven billion dollars just in Ontario alone, said Mr. Brander, reciting statistics from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. "The net cash income for Ontario farmers had dropped 10 per cent in 1989 and the OFA is predicting an eight per cent drop in income for 1990."

Mr. Brander says his own return on investment is only one per cent. "If other businesses had that, they'd be gone."

Other issues such as property taxes, the chain of economic hardships (when one business closure affects another), add to the strain on local farmers.

"Farmers are price takers, not price setters," he said, and when there are fewer buyers for agricultural commodities, farmers can only sell their product at whatever price they're offered.

Mr. Brander's grasp of world market issues and the problems facing the agriculture industry come not only from his farming



Harry Brander of Norval has a message but he just didn't want to say it, he wanted to announce it with this bold sign placed on the front lawn of his beef farm. He wants to get people wondering what will happen if farmers continue to leave the unprofitable Ontario agriculture industry. (Herald photo)

experience, but through involvement in local farm organizations. He is the current president of the Halton Soil and Crop Association, past president and member of the Halton Cattlemen's Association, board member of the Halton Agricultural Advisory Committee, and committee member of the Halton Region Conservation Authority Rural Beaches Program.

Probably the most intense organization he belongs to is the Halton Federation of Agriculture which makes up part of the On-

tario Federation of Agriculture, of which he is a director. This organization is basically designed to lobby government on behalf of farmers and Mr. Brander is hoping good things will come from the new NDP government for the agricultural sector.

"It's an opportune time for us since the NDP have very few preconceived ideas and are quite willing to learn about us and listen to what we have to say."

He hopes the government may help prevent the numbers of

farmers failing or leaving the industry.

Mr. Brander also hopes the 'Just Think' sign on his lawn will help as well. So far, he's had positive response from local residents concerning the message.

"Local farmers think it's a positive move and think it's good that somebody is doing something to make urban people more aware of farming."

Also, it is an important message, he says, "because food really is the basis of survival."

## Cancer Society to benefit from vaudeville show

Local musician Edgar Thatcher decided the best way he could help the Halton Hills Cancer Society to better educate the public about the society's work and raise money for the society was through his craft - the performing arts.

Mr. Thatcher's production company, Edgar T Productions, in conjunction with the Halton Hills Cancer Society, will be

hosting "The Spectacular New Age Vaudeville Show for 1991," Feb. 15 and 16 at the John Elliott Theatre in Georgetown.

Those attending either of the two shows, which get underway at 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, will be treated to a series of local and Regional acts of national acclaim, said Mr. Thatcher.

Mr. Thatcher made a commitment to the Halton Hills Cancer

Society after cancer took his mother's life last August. Vera Thatcher drove a school bus in the community for 15 years.

He, along with his partner, Victor Hanson, will be headlining both nights as the "Men Without Hairs" act. Mr. Thatcher describes the act as high tech vaudeville. It involves traditional vaudeville type entertainment - singing, dancing and physical humor with high tech in-

struments such as synthesizers and wireless instruments.

People will also be able to make a donation in memory of someone, as a patron of the show in support of the Cancer Society and the local arts scene, he said. The in memory notation will appear on the show's official program. Arrangements can be made through the society by calling 877-1124 Monday to Friday from 1 to 4 p.m.

Also included as part of the show will be a door prize each night of a painting donated by local artist Linda Donais, and a photographic show in the art gallery beside the theatre.

"We're trying to bring a full perspective of the arts to the community," said Mr. Thatcher.

Friday's show includes nationally-acclaimed Vaudevillian performer Jeff Bradley who will treat audience members to some of his innovative juggling techniques. Also that night, former Georgetown resident and singer/songwriter Kevin Head will perform. At one time Mr. Head opened for internationally-

known recording artist Chris DeBurgh.

Former local residents and musicians Bill and Janine Kent will perform as will well-known singer and Globe Theatre member Debbie Tilson.

Saturday's show also includes musical comedian Roger James, singer, songwriter James Campbell and the famous puppet troupe The Purple Dragon.

The show's musical director is Paul Thompson, whom Mr. Thatcher describes as a "local musical legend."

All of the artists are performing without pay, said Mr. Thatcher.

After each show a reception will be held, giving audience members a chance to meet the performers. Tickets cost \$12 per person and \$10 for seniors. They can be obtained through the Cancer Society.

Mr. Thatcher acknowledged the tough economic times make it difficult for people to support charity groups but in his words, "Cancer knows no recession, the troubles of the February wind or the perils of new taxes."



The new pop vaudevillian act "Men Without Hairs" will be headlining a two night benefit for the Halton Hills Cancer Society Feb. 15 and 16 at the John Elliott Theatre. Local musician Edgar Thatcher (right) and

his partner Victor Hanson comprise the act. For ticket information call the cancer society at 877-1124. (Photo submitted)

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