

## COMMENT

# Here's a farmer cutting hay ... with a plow?

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A Ted Bit

Last week, I spoke at the Peel/Halton Cattlemen's Association Annual General Meeting.

As an opener, I told a story about my sisters who are retired school teachers. In the 1960s, when my oldest sister was at Lakeshore Teachers' College, student teachers were sent out to practice teaching assignments at schools, to gain experience under the direction of an experienced teacher. My sister and another student teacher were assigned to a public school in Toronto.

The class was studying farming— my sister was delighted, able to use her farm experience. The other student teacher was from downtown Toronto, and her knowledge of farming could have been printed on the head of a pin.

The Toronto student teacher taught a lesson on farmers making hay. She held up a photo saying, "Class, this is a farmer cutting his hay. He feeds it to his cows when he's done."

My sister was speechless—it was a photo of a farmer plowing a field. Following the class, my sister pointed out the error to the student teacher and the experienced teacher.

Their response, "Are you sure? With those round blade things, it looks like he's cutting the hay...."

My sister assured them she knew, but they didn't trust her opinion. Those two teachers misinformed a class of 30 students on the practices of farming. Multiply that by the number of classes they taught, and the number of years they were teachers and you have a huge number of students who were misinformed.

One could suggest it's the teachers' fault for the wrong information, particularly when they wouldn't listen to my sister.

But others were to blame too— the farming community. Urban dwellers can't know about the agricultural sector, unless they are told. And sadly, farmers aren't talking.

As farmers, we complain about 'injustices' we have to endure— road rage, neighbours complaining about noises and smells associated with livestock, and cash croppers disturbing the evening with the roar of their huge machinery running into the wee hours of the night.

But consumers need to know that calf is bawling its head off because he's been weaned from his mother, not being tortured. It's a totally natural process— like all

babies, calves must be weaned from their mothers.

The cash cropper must operate 18-hour days—sometimes into the night— because it's a short season, and that's how he makes his living.

Farmers must take any opportunity to promote themselves, to receive a more understanding response from those who are not familiar with the business.

The word 'Sustainability' is one of those sexy phrases today, up there with 'green,' and 'environmentally-friendly'.

Farmers wrote the book on sustainability and land stewardship. They've been reusing and recycling for generations. But do they tell the world of consumers about that?

Nope, not a word.

I recently came across the 'Agriculture more than ever' website. It's full of positive info that we all should know. For example, we hear the average age of today's farmer is in the late 50s. That's depressing information for both today's farmers and consumers. But look at the other side of the equation.

The 'Agriculture more than ever' website reads 'Almost 25,000 of today's farmers are under the age of 25...'

That's pretty positive.

And with today's technology and equipment, a 25-year-old can accomplished much more work in a given time, than he could have 30 years ago. Having 25,000 young, strong farmers is saying this industry has great potential.

It's long overdue that we educate.

Back in the summer, beef prices skyrocketed, and the press reported how it cost a fortune to buy a steak for the barbecue.

But by late fall, meat prices had bottomed out.

Was there a story about the low meat prices, and how farmers were losing thousands of dollars trying to sell their beef that was fattened on high-priced feed?

Not a peep.

Another fact— Canadian farmers produce the safest food in the world.

But do we tell people about that?

Farmers must speak up.

And consumers must know about the challenges they face.

If not, I'm pretty sure they'll just carry on assuming that farmer is out in the field-cutting his hay... with a plow.

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