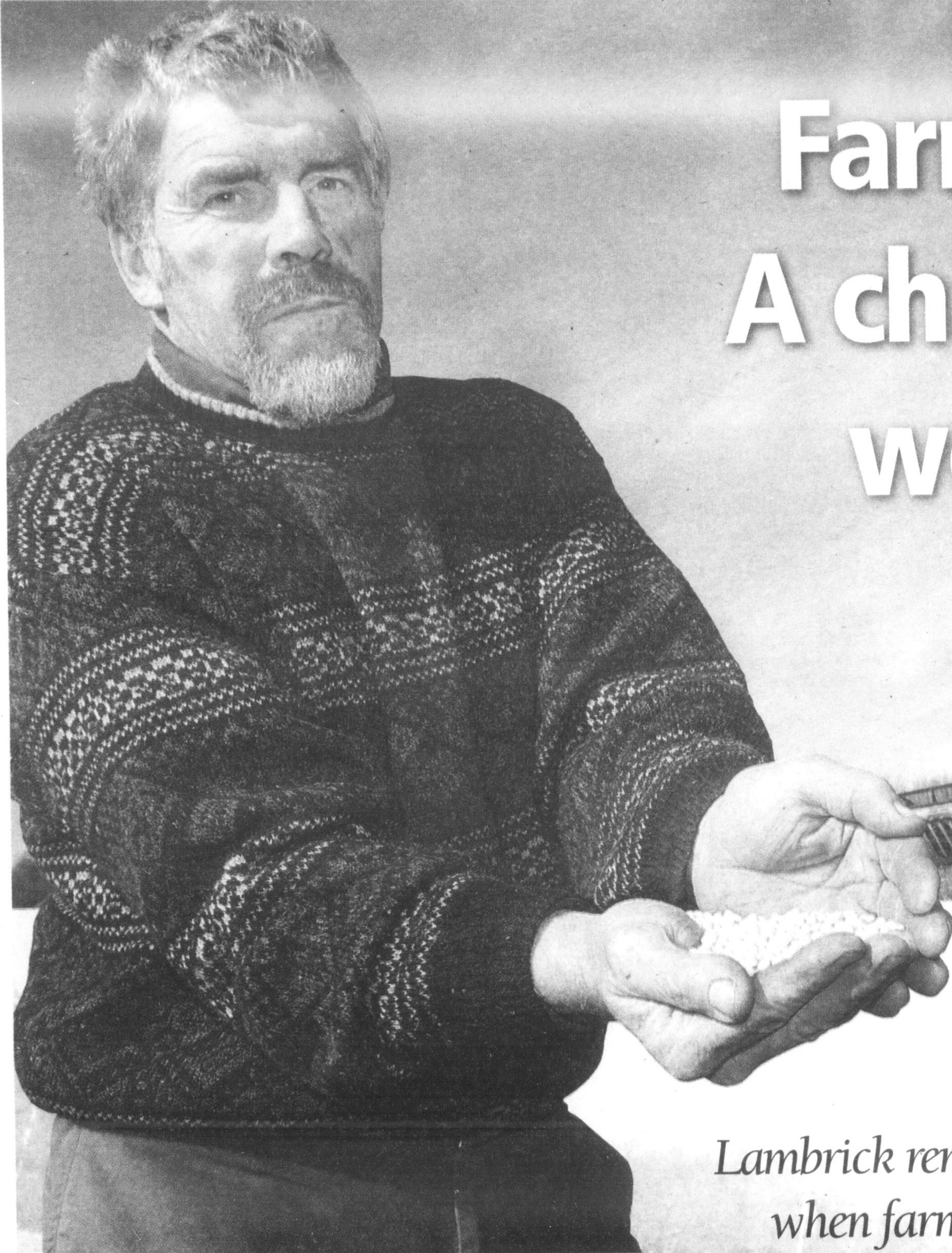


Farming: A changed world



GRAHAM PAINE / CANADIAN CHAMPION

Grain farmer Peter Lambrick has watched the world of agriculture become increasingly complex over the past three decades. While he used to simply get up in the morning and jump on his combine, he now spends a lot of time doing paperwork, reading up on legislation and taking courses to stay on top of the changes in his sector.

Lambrick remembers the good old days when farming was a simpler task

Being a farmer is definitely a lot different today than in decades gone by. There's more technology, an increasing load of paperwork and non-agricultural neighbours moving in who may not like what you're doing. Over the next three weeks in the Champion's Friday edition, we'll take a closer look at the local agricultural sector and what it takes to make it as a farmer. Today's story is the first in the series of three.

By **Melanie Hennessey**
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Peter Lambrick rumbles down Derry Road in his farm combine on a cold, crisp Monday morning.

The large piece of machinery tops out between 30 and 40 km/h, making many drivers behind him impatient and anxious to pass. But the cars flying by don't faze Lambrick.

"Traffic around here has gotten worse, but all in all people do give me a reasonable berth," he remarks. "And if they run into me, they'll be the ones worse off."

Such is the life of a farmer working hard to make a living in Canada's fastest-growing municipality.

While development is taking over pre-

cious farmland at an alarming rate, farmers like Lambrick are holding their own in north and west Milton — an area that's still relatively untouched by the seas of new homes that now dominate the east.

As the 56-year-old expertly steers the combine up and down a field of corn he rents on Guelph Line, he reflects on how things have changed in the agricultural industry over the years.

"Farming is not as simple as it once was," he said. "I take courses most winters to keep up with what's going on in agriculture."

Keeping abreast of new legislation that impacts the farming community also takes up a good chunk of Lambrick's time, along with an abundance of paper work.

"You used to be able to just get out into the fields right away. Now, everything has to be written down," he said.

So while Lambrick's day starts at 7 a.m., he's actually doing office work — filling out documents, getting caught up on e-mails and consulting his computer for the latest on weather and the grains and oilseeds market.

Technology has even made its way into farming equipment, with an on-board computer telling Lambrick everything from what his yields are to the moisture level in the crops.

"Farming is no longer a job for weak minds and strong backs," he said.

And Lambrick can speak from experience, having been in the industry for over three decades.

The agriculture veteran grew up on a farm in England and came to Canada in 1973, leaving behind five generations of farmers in his family.

"I spent most of the summer of '73 travelling southwestern Ontario doing farm work," he said.

Later that year, he became the manager of a large hog farm north of Campbellville. But after about a year, a disastrous barn fire wiped out the operation.

"That's when I started working for myself," he said, explaining he rented about 300 acres of land in the Campbellville area and worked in the small grains sector. "Growing grains was a reasonably good living."

More than 30 years later, Lambrick is still going strong in the grain sector, but now rents more than 1,100 acres of workable ground.

But even with more farmland, there are still other forces that can affect a farmer's profits, such as Mother Nature.

The dry weather that plagued Halton last summer took its toll on local farmers.

"For both of my crops — soybeans and

corn — the yield in 2007 was less than half of what it was the year before," he said. "I think most farmers were pretty disappointed last year."

Lambrick went on to express concern about a problem facing the farming industry as a whole — the lack of young people getting into agriculture or taking over the family farm.

"Many farmers are getting older. The average age of farmers is in the low fifties, and the younger generation isn't coming in," he said.

"I don't think the government is taking this into account."

He acknowledged that farming isn't as easy to get into anymore, but noted there are still avenues that young people can pursue to make money, such as organic farming.

While Lambrick said he doesn't know when he'll retire, he admits that farming was definitely easier when he was younger.

"It is not as enthralling as it used to be because the margins are so much tighter — there's no margin for error. You can't afford to screw up," he said.

"It's a lot different from when I started, that's for sure."

Melanie Hennessey can be reached at mhennessey@miltoncanadianchampion.com.