



"Your mind has to be wide open and welcome to opportunities," says Don Hudson, as he explains how he and Deb think about farming at Valleepine in Black Creek.

In a way, it's how they came into farming in the first place. Change presented an opportunity. Don had been a special ed.

teacher in Brighton but was no longer needed at a shrinking school, and Deb's family wanted to retire from the farm. It seemed like an opening for them to embark upon farming themselves. They sold their home where they'd been living in Codrington for a down payment on the farm, and because it was a dairy farm with some stability and good expectation of revenue, they were able to get a mortgage from the Farm and Credit Corporation.

Don, (coming from Toronto originally,) had lots to learn. He'd been in the county as a teenager; by helping out, he at least "knew hay" he says. He and Deb came down from Codrington every weekend for four months to apprentice on the farm before taking it on full time. Deb recalls, "It wasn't easy, but anything worthwhile isn't. Don had to work really hard."

So, they started out with a dairy farm. Deb was the only extra hand; she would "work with the first baby in a carriage, with mesh over it to keep away the flies, in between the rows of cows, while I was milking."

As time rolled by they wanted the farm business to be able to support some help, "so we could go to a wedding if we wanted to, or stop for a break." However, the land base wasn't big enough with dairy, so they evolved to beef.

Then, after a surgery each, Deb and Don were finding the beef cattle were a bit much to handle and they adapted again. It was "a little spark" of an idea that took them down a new track. "Andrew Miller and Kevin Thompson at Cherryvale asked us to grow buckwheat for Stonemill Bakehouse... and a wonderful relationship began with Gottfried Boehringer."

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They were on a new learning curve, "Going organic, because that is where consumer demand was and there wasn't enough certified land in the market." Stonemill needed Rye and wanted it locally sourced to avoid the environmental footprint from transportation.

Don and Deb had now discovered a way of farming (with his own seed and no need to purchase chemicals) "which reduced input cost per acre to \$60 from about \$250." Ever curious, Don experimented with crop rotation and reduced diesel fuel use by cultivating only every other year. By going back to a frost seeding method, and capitalizing on the action of nature, he can further reduce the use of fuel.

I am struck by how creative farmers are, to adapt and thrive. Some of these "new" practices come from the past. Deb hopes that there will be more "smaller farms, mixed farms; I call it back to the future."

"Don't forget what your parents and grandparents knew," adds Don.

They are a very positive couple, talking about the "silver linings" they see. For example, when hasty combining appeared to have wasted grain after bush hogging, the rye came up a second year and become a crop that cost very little. They are optimistic about the possibilities for farming to support quality nutrition and to continue to be the producers of food security, providing a good base for thriving communities.

They willingly shared their valuable time to talk with me and see the farming community as a generous one. "Farmers are generous with their knowledge. You don't have to have a meeting to decide whether we're all in this together - because we're all in this together."

Even though Deb and Don have much knowledge to share, they will always be "listening to and observing" others and their own land. Their minds are definitely still "wide open" and Don, at the age of 70, obviously enjoys being called "Junior" by his more experienced neighbours, like Bill Creasy, Ken Marisett and Wilbur Miller.