

## Question of the Week

*What do you think could be done to attract businesses to locate in downtown Essex?*

"I don't know about getting new stores, but I've been a regular visitor to Essex stores since I came to see all the vintage cars at the Cruise Day. The music downtown is great. The people who wait on you, for instance at Schinkel's and the Deluxe Restaurant, are so friendly." – Andrew Elliott, Leamington

"Promote free parking areas. Main street is so small, it fills up quickly. There are parking signs but they should say that there is free parking." – Bud Bruner, Essex

"Fill up the stores. There are quite a few empty stores. It looks awful. At least put in a nice window." – Joanne Sorrell

"Not too much. It's a small town. It's a bedroom town." – Steve Szejbut, Essex

"When the merchants come in, they don't get told at the town hall in regards to the BIA tax, they get told about the business tax, and if the BIA tax was \$75 a year, that the people could handle, but what else they have to pay is a bit extortionate." – Nan Cameron, Essex

*Last week's question – Should elected officials and town employees have credit card privileges? – brought in an additional response:*

"I guess it depends whether they are always out of pocket for expenses related to their job. If so then sure, because even if expenses are reimbursed the councillor is still out the cash until the cheque comes. You wouldn't want the councillor's lack of cash to become an issue in their personal finances or interfere with the smooth running of the government. Credit card receipts provide a list of where money was spent and if something is questionable the councillor need only provide a reason why the money was spent. Or you could still use a requisition form before purchases are allowed. But in the end a credit card could streamline the whole accounting process." – Dennis Chadwick, Woodslee

To respond to next week's question **CALL DAN** at 519-776-4268, ext. 13 to leave your response. You must provide your name and phone number. You can also drop us an email at [essexfreepress@on.aibn.com](mailto:essexfreepress@on.aibn.com) or **FAX** us at 519-776-4014. Please be brief – 25 to 40 words. Deadline for responses: Monday at 9 a.m.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Promises, promises

It's election time again which brings with it the campaign advertisement horse manure.

In the last election, my co-workers and I would bring the different advertisements of those running for office into work and discuss the merits of each candidate. We chuckled at Lakeshore candidate Tom Bain's promise, a promise that seems to be repeated with each subsequent election. He will keep taxes down and he will improve services. Really, come on now. The two statements contradict each other. Common sense tells me that it costs money to improve services and to do so, a tax increase will result. Yet here is that same old worn out and nonsensical promise yet again! My taxes keep going up and my services continue to diminish. It is a feat of impossibility so it shouldn't be promised. Then again he must think people are swallowing it because he got re-elected and he is giving it another go-

around.

It would be really nice for once if a candidate actually delivered on even a few of the promises that they hype up at election time. Better yet, there should be a councillor report card and if they don't deliver as promised, out they go.

We should not accept the many promises at face value. We should remember that these people will promise the world but, at the end of the day, they must be accountable for what they have promised. If it looks warm and fuzzy, that's probably all it is. Peruse the material with caution. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. They are trying to get you to swallow their promises – promises that they have no intention of fulfilling – and vote for them. Don't be led down the garden path. At Lakeshore, we have had our fill of that already.

Russ Dobrich  
Maidstone

### Re: Spending guidelines

It is hard for me to believe that our town is paying \$15 to \$20 to process a cheque. I have two chequing accounts and do not pay anything to process one or twenty cheques. Maybe our town is dealing at the wrong facility.

I am not challenging the amount of money spent with these credit cards, but where it is spent. Someone running for council talks about enhancing and revitalizing the downtown. Why? The reason we have empty stores is we do not support them. Unfortunately, large sums of money that could and should be spent with our merchants in Essex and Harrow is going out of town.

I am not soliciting votes for anyone but I think it is time that all taxpayers take a good look at the ballot and vote for someone who will get you the most for your tax dollar and make our employees shop with our merchants.

Jack Harrison  
Essex

# How long can the world feed itself?

We are still living off the proceeds of the Green Revolution, but that hit diminishing returns twenty years ago. Now we live in a finely balanced situation where world food supply just about meets demand, with no reserve to cover further population growth. But the population will grow anyway, and the world's existing grain supply for human consumption is being eroded by three different factors: meat, heat and biofuels.

For the sixth time in the past seven years, the human race will grow less food than it eats this year. We closed the gap by eating into food stocks accumulated in better times, but there is no doubt that the situation is getting serious. The world's food stocks have shrunk by half since 1999, from a reserve big enough to feed the entire world for 116 days then to a predicted low of only 57 days by the end of this year.

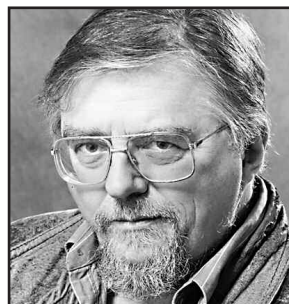
That is well below the official safety level, and there is no sign that the downward trend is going to reverse. If it doesn't, then at some point not too far down the road we reach the point of absolute food shortages, and rationing by price kicks in. In other words, grain prices soar, and the poor start to starve.

The miracle that has fed us for a whole generation now was the Green Revolution: higher-yielding crops that enabled us to almost triple world food production between 1950 and 1990 while increasing the area of farmland

by no more than ten percent. The global population more than doubled in that time, so we are now living on less than half the land per person that our grandparents needed. But that was a one-time miracle, and it's over. Since the beginning of the 1990s, crop yields have essentially stopped rising.

The world's population continues to grow, of course, though more slowly than in the previous generation. We will have to find food for the equivalent of another India and another China in the next fifty years, and nobody has a clue how we are going to do that. But the more immediate problem is that the world's existing grain supply is under threat.

One reason we are getting closer to the edge is the diversion of grain for meat production. As incomes rise, so does the consumption of meat, and feeding animals for meat is a very inefficient way of using grain. It takes between eleven and seventeen calories of food (almost all grain) to produce one calorie of beef, pork or chicken, and the world's production of meat has increased fivefold since 1950. We now get through five billion hoofed animals and fourteen billion poultry a year, and it takes slightly over a third of all our grain to feed



**gwynne dyer**

them.

Then there's the heat. The most visible cause of the fall in world grain production -- from 2.68 billion tonnes in 2004 to 2.38 billion tonnes last year and a predicted 1.98 billion tonnes this year -- is droughts, but there are strong suspicions that these droughts are related to climate

change.

Moreover, beyond a certain point hotter temperatures directly reduce grain yields. Current estimates suggest that the yield of the main grain crops drops ten percent, on average, for every one degree Celsius that the mean temperature exceeds the optimum for that crop during the growing season. Which may be why the average corn yield in the US reached a record 8.4 tonnes per hectare in 1994, and has since fallen back significantly.

Finally, biofuels. The idea is elegant: the carbon dioxide absorbed when the crops are grown exactly equals the carbon dioxide released when the fuel refined from those crops is burned, so the whole process is carbon-neutral. And it would be fine if the land used to grow this biomass was land that had no alternative use, but that is rarely the case.

In South-East Asia, the main source of biofuels is oil palms, which are mostly grown on cleared rainforest. In the United States, a "corn rush" has been unleashed by government subsidies for ethanol, and so many ethanol plants are planned or already in existence in Iowa that they could absorb the state's entire crop of corn (maize, mealies). In effect, food is being turned into fuel -- and the amount of ethanol needed to fill a big four-wheel-drive SUV just once uses enough grain to feed one person for an entire year.

There is a hidden buffer in the system, in the sense that some of the grain now fed to animals could be diverted to feed people directly in an emergency. On the other hand, the downward trend in grain production will only accelerate if it is directly related to global warming. And the fashion for biofuels is making a bad situation worse.

It's only in the past couple of centuries that a growing number of countries have been able to stop worrying about whether there will be enough food at the end of the harvest to make it through to next year. The Golden Age may not last much longer.

*Gwynne Dyer is a Canadian journalist, syndicated columnist and military analyst who has written on international affairs for more than 20 years.*