## Ecological Farming in Ontario

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### What We Do

Established in 1979 by farmers for farmers, the Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario (EFAO) is a membership organization that focuses on farmer-led education, research and community building. EFAO brings farmers together so they can learn from each other and improve the health of their soils, crops, livestock and the environment, while running profitable farm businesses.

### Vision

We envision an Ontario where thriving ecological farms are the foundation of our food system, and where agriculture protects our resources, increases biodiversity, mitigates climate change, and fosters healthy, vibrant communities.

### Mission

EFAO support farmers to build resilient ecological farms and grow a strong knowledge sharing community.

### **Ecological Farming In Ontario**

*Ecological Farming in Ontario* is published quarterly by EFAO as a benefit of membership to help keep farmers and supporters informed and in touch with one another through articles on relevant farming topics, current farmer-led research, upcoming events and other news of interest.

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Help make *Ecological Farming in Ontario* a farmer's journal! Submit articles, photos, opinions and news to editor@efao.ca. We reserve the right to edit submissions for space and/or clarity.

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### **BOARD PERSPECTIVE**

## **Ecological Farming and Racial Justice**

#### **By Katrina McQuail**

was raised believing I was not racist, that I saw people for themselves and not their skin tone, but I have learned that this is not true anti-racism. What is the difference between not racist and anti-racist? What I have learned is that to be "not racist" isn't a thing. It implies that one can be silent or passive. But I have learned that one is either racist (upholding the current oppressive, white supremacy systems) or anti-racist (actively working to dismantle the socialized and systemic racism and acceptance of the structural oppression). Through training in anti-racism and conversations that I have participated in over the last few years (and making lots of mistakes) I have become aware of how the cultural and societal systems that I participate in without thought are inherently racist and white-centring.

Once I started to see racism, it was impossible to unsee it, including in the context of my work as a farmer. This awareness is a gift, as it allows me to consider the health, happiness, and prosperity of those other than myself and those outside my experience. The land that I farm is stolen land. While I did not personally steal it, that doesn't make it less stolen. Yes, it is land that was obtained through a treaty, but given the poor track record that Canada has for honouring treaties, it feels more accurate to say stolen. What, then, is my responsibility to that land? To the communities from whom experience force from police. We've heard the horrific experiences of Indigenous

people: Joyce Echaquan at a hospital in Quebec and the Mi'kmaq fishing dispute currently in the news. BIPOC experience higher food insecurity, less land access, and racism in accessing social services such as health care, just to name a few.

Systemic racism is embedded into the Canadian agricultural context. Consider the issue of land ownership and access. Indigenous peoples had their land stolen from them. Then, in some situations, Black people who cleared land, had it stolen from them by white settlers. What can our practices of reparations look like in the context of farming? Though there are instances where migrant workers are getting fair housing, treatment and wages, there are far more where they are being abused and underpaid. When we think about agricultural job postings, internships and apprenticeships, what are the barriers for BIPOC to these opportunities for hands-on learning and skill building? Where are the BIPOC farmers in Ontario and how are we supporting them? Do we know them? How are we building genuine and consensual relationships? How are we replenishing the land for the gifts it gives us? How do we restore our relationship to the land itself?

it was stolen? Locally, the Saugeen Ojibway Nation just had their closing remarks in a treaty and title claim trial against multiple counties, the Ontario Provincial, and Canadian National Government. This claim has been ongoing for over 20 years. "As Anishinaabe, we have a responsibility to the lands

EFAO is creating space in this publication to amplify the voices of farmers who have been marginalized. We deeply value the voices of all our members, but recognize that there are many whose experiences we have not reflected in our newsletter. If you identify as part of an underrepresented community (i.e. Black, Indigenous and people of colour, LGBTQ+, farmers with disabilities or differing abilities), we want to hear and share your farming story. Please contact editor@efao.ca. This is a paid opportunity.

and the waters in our territory," Chippewas of Nawash Chief Greg Nadjiwon said. "When we brought this claim 20 years ago, it was about and still is about seeking recognition of the importance of that continuing relationship."

I have found the need for balance between acting hastily and acting well and what hangs in the balance is the urgent need to act. Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC) are being murdered. Just this summer, an Ontario Human Rights Commission report showed that Black people are significantly more likely than white people (or other People of Colour) to I don't want to make assumptions about where anyone is in this work. I know we can all learn and do more. I was invited into active anti-racism work in 2016 by some folks who believed that I had the capacity to do and be better. This is my invitation to you to join the EFAO in our anti-racism work as we strive to do and be better. Unsure about a first step? Learn about the Indigenous peoples whose land you are on at native-land.ca.

The EFAO board and staff are committed to anti-racism work. Over the next months (and years), we will create policies, practices, and strategies to remove barriers and create support and opportunities for BIPOC farmers and aspiring farmers.

Katrina McQuail (she/her/hers) is a white, cis-gendered, hetpresenting person with land access. Her identity is more complex and nuanced than fits into this space. She is a first generation Canadian settler who lives and farms on the traditional territory of the Anishinabewaki, Odawa and Mississauga (treaty 45 <sup>‡</sup>).



### LIVESTOCK

## Pasture Management for Sheep and Lambs at Pasture Hill Farm

### By Jim Johnston

In the following, I would like to give an overview of our pasture management system for sheep and lambs. Our farm is located just west of New Liskeard in the Temiskaming district of northeastern Ontario. The soil is mostly clay, some tiled and some not tiled. Our sheep flock is raised outdoors year round on pasture and stored forage (dry hay and wrapped bales).

Our goal is to have permanent forage stands, meaning they are (hopefully) never ploughed and reseeded. On our tillable land, our forage stands are all 15-25 years since establishment, whereas the areas that are inaccessible to tractors have been in grass for over 50 years. I will describe below various management practices we use to keep these old meadows productive.

### Non Grazing Practices: SOIL TESTING AND FERTILIZER: I

would encourage the use of soil testing to know what the limiting nutrients are in your particular soils. My own philosophy for hay and pasture fertility is to use small amounts of nitrogen to encourage the grasses but not too much as we also want to keep or promote legumes (e.g. trefoil and clovers) in the stand. We also apply relatively small amounts of phosphorus fertilizer, less than recommended by our soil test, but we plan on putting these small amounts on for a number of years until we can raise our soil test levels to the desired level. I studied pasture management under the supervision of Dr. E. Ann Clark at Ontario Agriculture College in the 1980's. Her saying regarding pasture improvement was "evolution, not revolution", meaning a slow improvement over time using many

tools is preferable to a "revolution" by ploughing, reseeding, and applying large amounts of fertilizer. I tend to follow this thought process myself.

**MANURE MANAGEMENT:** One major benefit of grazing our sheep as much as possible is that most of the manure and urine is returned directly to the soil, thus reducing the amount of equipment, fuel, and time needed to spread manure from barns, yards, and outdoor wintering areas. At the end of the grazing season, once the ewes pasture is all used up or the snow is too deep to graze (over about 6" depth), we roll bales out on pre-selected pastures until mid-December. This allows any uneaten hay plus manure and urine to be spread over the pasture, which has resulted in significant improvements in the productivity of our permanent pastures.

When the snow gets deep in December, we bring all our ewes home and sort them into breeding groups and they are assigned to various outdoor wintering areas. In these areas, we roll out bales all winter and over time build up a pack. Each wintering area has a windbreak and we will periodically bed these areas with straw and in time this builds up another pack. In spring we push these packs up into windrows with a loader. These windrows then heat and break down some before being spread in August and September.

When deciding where to haul and spread manure from the wintering areas, the temptation is to spread as close as possible to the source, but manure is usually most valuable farthest from the source since these are the areas that have not received sufficient manure in the past. The other factor to consider in where to spread manure is that it should go back to areas that were cut for hay, as cutting hay removes large amounts of nutrients from a field.

**FROST SEEDING:** We like to maintain 15 to 25% legume content in our pasture and hay fields. Legumes have been shown to increase animal performance, improve drought tolerance, and they fix atmospheric nitrogen in the soil. However legumes tend to not be long lived so they need to be re-established every few years. In our case, this is accomplished by frost seeding. This involves broadcasting legume seeds very early in the spring, once the snow is mostly gone but when there are still frosts occurring at night. The small legume seeds tend to be drawn into the soil as it freezes and thaws in the spring



Lambs in the pasture.

and then it is ready to germinate as soon as the soil warms up. As a caution, frost seeding can be quite successful in some years and less so in other years, but by doing some fields each year we can keep a reasonable legume content in our stands. The percentage of each legume in the mix varies but generally we use half or more trefoil on permanent pastures and half or more red clover on the hayfields. You will note that we do not use alfalfa. Since our land is mostly not tile drained and we want a very long stand life, we don't normally use alfalfa in our frost seed mixtures.

### **Grazing Practices:**

**ROTATIONAL GRAZING:** Once lambing is mostly complete (mid-June in our operation) we will begin to rotationally graze the ewes and lambs, moving each group every 3 to 5 days. The basic rule to determine how long to leave animals in a particular paddock is that each plant should only get bitten off once during a particular grazing rotation. If the period of stay is too long, some plants will grow back enough to be bitten a second time which depletes root reserves. Also, certain parasites can progress through their life cycle rapidly in hot, wet weather, thus a shorter period of stay is desired to avoid re-infection. We try to move sheep off a paddock when the remaining plants are at least 5 cm in height. Grazing too close to the ground slows regrowth of the plant and can also increase consumption of parasite larvae. In practice, we find that the ewes will graze certain preferred areas very close while leaving other lessdesired areas taller, so an average height of 5 cm across a paddock will usually have quite a bit of variation.

**REST PERIODS:** The basic objective of rotational grazing is to provide the forage plants with a rest period between defoliations. The length of the rest period will vary depending on the time of year, as regrowth is much more rapid in spring and early summer than in the drier parts of mid summer or the low sunlight periods in autumn. In our operation, we like to see a rest period of 25 to 35 days in the first half of the season but perhaps 40 to 50 days later in the season. On our hayfields, we like to see at least 40 days between cutting hay and grazing, but some fields will have 80 to 90 days rest between cutting and grazing. Long rest periods generally help in promoting good winter survival

and can also aid in reducing parasite burdens on the pasture.

Our permanent pastures normally will get 3 passes per year, sometimes 4, while our hayfields normally get 1 cut and 1 or 2 grazing passes per year. While we could get more passes by having shorter rest periods, we feel that would hurt our root growth and in turn reduce the winter hardiness of our pastures.

#### FENCE, WATER, AND PREDATOR

**CONTROL:** On the practical side, sheep need decent fencing to allow for successful rotational grazing. Our fencing is almost all electric, with some older page wire fences still in use, although much of our page wire fence also has an electric "offset" wire to keep the sheep from pushing on it or grazing through it. Perimeter fences are mostly 12.5 gauge high tensile fences with 5 strands, interior subdivision fences are often 3 strand using 16, 14, or 12.5 gauge wire. Any new fencing we build now is 12.5 gauge high tensile wire. On permanent pasture, we often will further subdivide larger areas using temporary fencing, such as polywire or electric netting,



Ewes and lambs grazing the second growth hayfield in August.

Some of our hay land has no fencing at all so we use a lot of temporary fencing to make paddocks. In this case we use electric netting. This is somewhat time and labour consuming, but with practice, paddocks can be put up and taken down quickly. We find the netting in combination with livestock protection dogs to be very successful in keeping coyotes and other predators away. In terms of protection from predators, having relatively small paddocks allows



the dogs to patrol the area easily and gather the flock quickly if there is a threat. Lambing time is when our flock is most susceptible to predation, so we are walking the pastures regularly not only looking for ewes and lambs that need help but also to inspect the perimeter for any signs of predation.

Hopefully the above has given

the reader some insight into how our pasture-based sheep flock is managed. Any sheep operation requires attention to detail, constant supervision and the willingness to constantly learn new management practices. On a pasturebased flock, managing animal behaviour, parasite management and maintaining productive pastures while keeping costs low are key factors to success. If you enjoy working with sheep, problem solving, and the great outdoors (in all weather conditions), then this style of farming could be for you.

Jim Johnston and Wanda Cook operate Pasture Hill Farm just west of New Liskeard, in northeastern Ontario. They have been raising sheep and lambs since 1993, with a current flock of 650 ewes, along with a smaller herd of direct market, grass-fed beef.

\*This article has been shortened from its original version – to read the full article, visit efao.ca/pasture-management-sheep

### **MEMBER PROFILE**

# **Cultivating Good Fortune**

Tempering our intense

#### By Angel Beyde

he seeds for our Good Fortune Farmstead were planted with a handful of wishes: for a life of purpose, happiness and hard work; for long days under the open sky; for stewarding a tiny corner of the earth by regenerating the soil and nurturing a healthy ecosystem; for the delight and pride in growing and selling beautiful produce; for a straightforward daily rhythm of facing and overcoming challenges, doing a job that is fundamental and necessary.

Nearly six years ago, we were struggling to support my mum who was seriously ill and needed to go into long-term care. My beloved job as an Urban Agriculture Coordinator at a Toronto food security non-profit was downsized, while my husband Raph was getting increasingly restless with the indoor life of a professional translator. Urban life was balanced by sweaty work in local community gardens, composting, growing food on our balcony, spending as much time outdoors as we could – but we needed a bigger, long-term change that would satisfy our mutual obsessions with feeding people, soil biology, local food sovereignty, working outside and building community.

I began to quietly cultivate this dream: a diversified, bio-intensive microfarm growing organic veggies, fruit and flowers, a few chickens and goats to nourish the soil. A community hub where people can learn, share food, spend time in nature. When I summoned the nerve to share this vision with Raph, he was so enthusiastic it quickly started to feel real. The friendly hills of Northumberland County beckoned and we envisioned putting down roots where we'd spent sunny times hiking and admiring the many organic farms in the area – all within a reasonable drive to the Toronto farmer's markets where we hoped to sell.

enthusiasm, however, was a persistent case of "too-lateitis." Being in our 40's, we never met anyone our age starting a small farm for the first time and it was seriously intimidating. While we're both in good shape, lovers of hard work (I currently run a social enterprise Eco-Landscaping company that employs people living with mental illness), we know that using your body day in, day out, to patiently coax the soil into producing abundant food and 2 livelihoods is no mean feat. JM Fortier's The Market Gardener handbook provided a ton of early encouragement, plus the financial and technical framework to create a sturdy business plan seedling. Soul Fire Farm founder Leah Penniman's Farming While Black provided an energizing mix of inspiration, technical know-how, recognition of the specific challenges facing BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of colour) growers as well as an appreciation for the immense historical contributions of people of African descent to modern regenerative agriculture.



No matter what life threw at us over the past 5 years (deaths in the family, loved ones needing support with dementia/ finances/job challenges), this profound wish to farm for the rest of our lives just kept growing inexplicably, fed by a taproot drawing from some powerful source of energy. As the Covid-19 pandemic increasingly highlights the profound connections between racial injustice and the climate crisis, at the



intersection of how our society grows the stuff of life (food!), we felt an intense push to move up our timeline and get farming.

Just as the long drought of last summer began to take hold in June, we started looking for land, updated our Farmlink profile, booked property viewings with a real estate agent – hoping to break ground in 2021 for our market garden farmstead. We were proud to be debtfree and had saved what we naively thought of as Quite a Lot of Money. The eye-watering prices we saw for farms or even tiny modest homes with a few acres, however, quickly made us feel like we'd saved a baggie of Canadian Tire dollars. Lol! We placed a successful bid on a 10-acre property with a small house, which we subsequently had to withdraw, as thousands and thousands of dollars in additional costs became revealed. Lifelong renters, we've learned about property ownership at a breakneck pace in the overheated Covid-19 real estate market of rural Ontario.

Owning (or at least lease-to-owning) the land we would farm is profoundly important for us to put down roots and be able to lovingly protect it for current and future generations' abundance. My father's father was born to African slaves on a sugar plantation in Suriname, South America. Slavery (and its close cousin's sharecropping, tenant farming and convict leasing) is not distant history in a book. It continues to profoundly shape present-day Canada and the U.S., countries whose wealth is built on centuries of stolen land and the stolen labour of millions of BIPOC. "The very serious function of racism is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being" - Toni Morrison"

Who has access to land to grow food, who can get loans, mentoring, housing, access to clean water, intergenerational wealth (e.g. inherited land or receiving a down payment from family), even life expectancy – systemic racism acts in all these areas to keep something modest like running a small market garden well out of reach for so many people of colour who have the skills, drive and desire to farm.

The brilliant Nobel laureate Toni Morrison once said "The very serious function of racism is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your

reason for being." I've had the great fortune to persevere through that distraction, compost a lot of 'manure' and grow a good life. Raph and I have our health in the midst of a global pandemic, we have determination, we have people to care for and to be loved by, a safe place to live and clean water to drink. We are abundantly fed by our incredible, hard-working farmer friends (we're looking at you, Joyfully Organic, Wheelbarrow Farm and Nith Valley Organics!). It's been a tough year to be looking for a farm, but we are heartened by so many surprising moments of connection, community, happiness and possibility. We know that our future farmstead is still out there patiently waiting for us to find it.

Come say hey on Instagram (@good\_fortune\_farmstead) or the web (www.goodfortunefarmstead.com). We'd love to hear from you – all farm leads welcome!



New articles added regularly

magazine.cog.ca

## EFAO's New Small Grains Program

his summer, EFAO announced a pilot Small Grains Program that supports Ontario farmers to diversify their crop rotation by adding a small grain followed by a legume cover or forage crop. Funded by the Weston Family Foundation, the pilot includes payments of \$40/acre for up to 100 acres, as well as participation in a Small Grains Network for training and farmer-tofarmer support and information about small grains production and marketing. This program was inspired by Practical Farmers of Iowa's Small Grains Cost Share Program.

Though the pilot year of the Small Grains Program has just begun, the program was greatly received and we were able to support 8 farmers to grow 600 acres of new small grains in Ontario for the 2021 season. These farmer-participants are growing winter wheat, spring wheat, spring rye, cereal rye, and oats in all regions of the province. In addition to the 8 participants in the payment program, EFAO welcomed 60+ other farmers to the Small Grains Network.

As we prepare to launch the Small Grains Network at this year's Virtual EFAO Conference, we wanted to share some additional information about the background of this new initiative and what EFAO hopes to accomplish in this pilot year. You can learn more about what inspired this program at: efao.ca/the-dirt-on-efao-small-grainsprogram; and about program details at: efao.ca/small-grains.

### Why small grains?

Diverse crop rotations are a core principle of ecological farming – and small grains are central to diverse crop rotations. In short, **small grains have big gains.** Adding small grains such as wheat, spelt, oats, barley, rye or triticale to a 2-year corn/soybean rotation supports higher corn and soybean yields and profitability, and many ecological benefits – listed below.

### Doesn't small grain production promote the use of herbicide and fungicide?

While conventional small grains production uses herbicides and fungicides, there is a robust body of research that shows that diversifying a crop rotation with small grains – both conventionally and organically – has a myriad of benefits.

### What are the ecological benefits of small grains?

- SMALL GRAINS REDUCE PESTICIDE USE: Diverse rotations can control weeds with up to 6 times less herbicide use.
- SMALL GRAINS HELP PROTECT AND BUILD SOIL HEALTH: A diversity of crops results in a diversity of roots, which provide food and habitat for soil organisms. Diverse roots and soil microorganisms improve soil structure, increase organic matter and help prevent erosion.
- SMALL GRAINS IMPROVE WATER QUALITY: Small grains keep roots in the ground in the spring, when they capture and use nitrate-rich water from the soil and, in turn, prevent nutrient run-off and erosion.
- SMALL GRAINS REDUCE GHG EMISSIONS AND FOSSIL ENERGY USE: Farmers can grow legume cover crops and forages after the grain is harvested, and use the nitrogen fixed by the legume to credit the next cash crop. Reduced fertilizer leads to reduced greenhouse gas emissions and less fossil energy use; and lower cost of production for the farmer.
- SMALL GRAINS HELP INTEGRATE LIVESTOCK ON THE LANDSCAPE:

Small grains can be used as feed and straw and the cover crop as forage.

### Is this program relevant to EFAO members?

This program is open to all farmers, including EFAO members, who are interested in diversifying their rotations with the addition of a new small grain (and cover crop).

At the heart of this program is a Small Grains Network of farmers across Ontario, that will provide training and farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing opportunities. We hope that this program and network will provide a pathway to ecological farming practices for farmers who may not otherwise explore them, and we look forward to welcoming new faces to EFAO. We also expect that EFAO members will be a big part of this network – benefiting from the learning opportunities and providing mentorship to fellow new ecological farmers. All small grain producers are welcome to join the Small Grains Network at any time. Just go to efao.ca/small-grains to sign up and join the community.

If you have any questions, suggestions or comments about this new program, please contact Maureen Balsillie, maureen@efao.ca.

Join the conversation by signing up to the Small Grains Network at efao.ca/small-grains/ or by using the hashtag



## Intensive Farm Start-up Program for New Farmers Coming January 2021

FAO is excited to announce a new, comprehensive farm planning course beginning January 2021. If you're serious about starting a farm and ready to start planning, this program is for you. Over the course of this program, participants will write a detailed farm plan, gain valuable insight from experienced farmers and receive oneon-one mentorship – all using an online/ virtual format.

### COMPREHENSIVE WEBINAR

**WORKSHOPS:** Start with your farm vision, and turn it into a solid plan you can use to guide you through the first years of farming. Bi-weekly, webinar workshops will take you through writing each section of your farm plan, covering farm financials and budgets, marketing strategies, legal requirements, record keeping and more.

### **PANEL DISCUSSIONS:** In the

weeks between webinar workshops, participants can ask questions and hear different strategies, challenges, tips and advice from panels of experienced farmers in an online meet-up. Each farm does things a little bit differently from the next – this is a great opportunity to use the experiences and insight from other ecological farmers to help decide what's best for your future farm.

### **ONE-ON-ONE MENTORSHIP: Once**

their farm plan is complete, participants will be paired with an experienced farmer for feedback and advice. This is an invaluable opportunity to get advice specific to you, your situation and goals.

### ACCESS TO START-UP FUNDING FOR

**NORTHERN ONTARIO NEW FARMERS:** If you're planning on starting up a farm in Northern Ontario, you may also be eligible to receive funding to cover 50% of start-up equipment and other capital expenses, to a maximum of \$10,000.

For more info, please visit efao.ca/farmstart-up-program

### Want to place a Classified ad?

Send your ad (up to 40 words, plus contact information) to`admin@efao.ca. Classifieds are \$15 for EFAO members and \$25 for non-members,`and \$0.25 per word above 40 words.

Classifieds also appear on the Opportunities page of the EFAO website.

### Applications for farmer-led research are now open!

Apply to EFAO's Farmer-Led Research Program for the 2021 growing season.

Application deadline: January 31, 2021

What are you curious about on your farm? Do you have an idea for a research or breeding trial and need help designing an experiment? EFAO can help you answer your on-farm questions with financial and technical support.

Apply to receive funding to conduct research for your farm. Support includes:

- \$500 farmer stipend;
- up to \$1,500 in research expenses;
- help with project development and analysis;
- network of farmer-researchers and academic advisors;
- and more!

For more information and to apply visit efao.ca/funding

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## Heritage Grain and On-Farm Research at Against the Grain Farms

Shelley Spruit co-owns Against The Grain Farms, and is an EFAO member and farmer-researcher who has been involved in the participatory plant breeding (PPB) program for grain in cooperation with The Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security. As you will hear from Shelley, she is passionate and knowledgeable about heritage grain in Ontario. You can read more about the results of her farmer-led research trial on page 14.

### EFAO: Why and when did you start farming?

Shelley: I am a fourth-generation farmer and you could say farming is in my bones. My husband, Tony, and I began farming together when we were married and have been life and business partners for over 33 years. He also came from a farming background. I always considered farming one of the highest callings that a person could aspire to. I take seriously the responsibility to steward land and grow healthy food that feeds people.

### EFAO: Please tell us a bit about your farm.

Shelley: We own and operate 250 acres of cash crops in North Dundas township in Eastern Ontario. The additional 50 acres we purchased seven years ago and it was then we began to really delve into a different approach to farming. We were interested and eager to learn more about regenerative farming, and the possibility of creating a market for heritage grain.

### EFAO: You have conducted a research project for your farm in cooperation with EFAO's Farmer-Led Research Program. Can you describe your research trials?

Shelley: As part of the journey of learning about regenerative agricultural practices and researching organic amendments for soil, we became interested to know more about the long-term benefits for soil health with the application of basalt rock. We did a one-year comparison on yield differences with replicated plots that had an application of basalt rock versus plots that did not.

## EFAO: What did you learn from your research trials, and how will it help you farm?

Shelley: I think it is very important that farmers know how to set up their own scientific study plots and learn how to collect data. Although we did not see any differences in yields from the application on the wheat plots, we believe this study should be studied over a two to three year period and perhaps not only be measuring yield but nutrient density of the grain.



Shelley Spruit holding amaranth.

### EFAO: In the past, you have also been involved in participatory plant breeding (PPB) of grains with the Bauta Initiative. Can you describe this work?

Shelley: For four years I participated in PPB on wheat varieties and for two years I participated in PPB for oat varieties. I believe it is empowering for the



Dr. Martin Entz, Aabir Dey and Marie-Eve Levert with Shelley Spruit in the wheat PPB Trial plots at Against the Grain.

farmers to be a part of seed selection. PPB places the value and importance on the farmers' input. Farmers usually aren't given the opportunities to have a direct input on selection of seed, but who knows the crop better and the traits of these crops than the farmer who walks and observes the crop all season and for many seasons? I believe that they are best suited to comment on traits, shortcomings, adaptability and flavour profile.

### EFAO: What motivates you to do onfarm research and PPB?

Shelley: Seed sovereignty!

## EFAO: What do you see as the broader impacts of farmer-led research and PPB?

Shelley: I believe PPB helps to demystify the plant breeding process – to take it out of the "ivory tower" and back in the hands of the farmer who plants, maintains and harvests these crops. No longer is the farmer only the purchaser of seed but is directly involved in the selection of varieties that are most needed in their particular farming environment. As a 2018 Nuffield scholar whose topic was PPB, I had the opportunity to travel and visit farmers all over North America, Europe and Central America that were involved with PPB. These farmers may have had different environments, different crop inputs, but the unifying chord was their ability to select seed and develop varieties that best suited their own unique growing needs. PPB values the farmers' knowledge, skill, and wisdom which has often been overlooked in the past half century.

We enjoy the knowledge-sharing aspect of EFAO. Sometimes farming

can be a lonely "everyman for himself" mentality. EFAO membership helps to create a learning based environment where farmers share their failures, their successes, and their aspirations for a new or different way of doing something. Farming is a continual learning curve which keeps it exciting and challenging!



### **RESEARCH REPORTS**

EFAO FIELD CROPS 2019: Basalt for heritage grains

## Does rock mineralizer increase yield of heritage wheat?





### Farmer-Researchers Shelley and Tony Spruit

Against the Grain Farms - East

Project timeline: Spring - Fall 2019

### IN A NUTSHELL

Basalt rock dust is a remineralizer that is used in other parts of the world but there is limited information on its effectiveness to supply crops with nutrients in neutral and alkaline soils. To test the efficacy of basalt as a mineralizer for grain, Shelley and Tony grew Heritage Amber Spring Wheat in replicated plots with and without basalt amendments.

### Key Findings

- Basalt rock dust had no detectable effect on Heritage Amber Spring Wheat yield, and benefits may take years to detect.
- There were also no other observable differences in growth, seed quality or disease resistance between treatment and control.
- It was a bad year for wheat production but, overall, Heritage Amber Spring Wheat - a landrace variety performed well against lodging and *Fusarium*.

### BACKGROUND

Basalt rock dust is a natural mineralizer with a high level of paramagnetism. A by-product of quarrying, it is mined in Canada and allowable under organic certification.

Rock dust has been used by indigenous farmers who grew near volcanoes; and it is used in Brazil as a "harmless cheap and simple alternative to fertilizing degraded... soils" (1). Since the 1930's, scientists have also reported benefits of rock dust, especially in sandy, acidic soils (2). More recently, scientists have shown that silicon - which is found in rock dust - enhances the resistance of plants to biotic and abiotic stresses (3). In contrast, other studies that found no effect of rock dust (4, 5).

After using basalt rock dust in their vegetable garden, Shelley and Tony observed greater disease resistance, drought tolerance, vitality and taste, deep root structure and longer periods of production. With these observations and knowing that wheat, as a monocot, has relatively high silicon requirements, the Spruits were curious to see what effect basalt rock dust had on their heritage grain.

### **METHODS**

To evaluate the effect of basalt rock dust, Shelley and Tony chose Heritage Amber Spring Wheat - a hard spring wheat that is high in protein and prized for bread baking. They grew replicated plots of the heritage wheat with and without basalt additions (Table 1) in a paired design (analyzed via paired t-test).

They added basalt (Huplaso; 1 tonne/acre) and NPK + sulphur fertilizer (475 lb/acre) on May 15, 2019 and planted all plots on May 18, 2019. They harvested on August 16, 2019.

Table 1	Paired design with 4 replicates and 8 plots total. Plots were (30 x 100' each) and basalt or control was randomly assigned to each pair.			
	Pair 1	Control	Basalt	
	Pair 2	Control	Basalt	
	Pair 3	Basalt	Control	
	Pair 4	Control	Basalt	

### RESULTS

#### Yield



- Yield of Heritage Amber Spring Wheat was not statistically or practically different in plots amended with and without basalt rock dust (P=0.21)
- There is a 21% chance that the 1.6 mean bushel difference is due to natural variation in yield among plots, and not the basalt.

#### Other Observations

Throughout the season, Shelley and Tony did not observe differences between the control and basalt treatment plots with regards to seed emergence, size of stock, plant height, seed quality, lodging, and signs of blight and Fusarium.

Overall, they observed smaller seed heads, lower protein levels and lower yields in 2019 compared to other years. This is likely a result of a cold and wet spring and five week drought mid-season.

At the same time, the Heritage Amber Spring Wheat a landrace variety - had a strong shaft that withstood lodging in all plots and made excellent straw. Even more, their landrace varieties had no detectable trace *Fusarium* (without spraying!) unlike many other growers in their area with registered varieties.

### TAKE HOME MESSAGE

In this study, there was no yield advantage for Heritage Amber Spring Wheat or other observable differences that can be attributed to the addition of basalt rock dust.

The function of basalt as a remineralizer of trace minerals means that the benefits of rock dust may take years to detect, especially for neutral to alkaline soils. Shelley and Tony also suspect that the benefits of rock dust for their heritage grain may show up in nutrient-density of the grain, not necessarily in yield or protein content.





**Photos:** Heritage Amber Spring Wheat growing at Against the Grain Farms.

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#### THANKS TO OUR PROJECT FUNDERS



### **FIELD CROPS**

# **A Succession Success Story**

### A new generation bets big on small grains for future generations

Brett Israel grew up with the best of both worlds – city life and farm life. He was raised in Kitchener, Ontario with close connection to his grandparent's farm just 45 minutes away in Wallenstein. His dad, Jamie, commuted to the family farm to work with grandpa Carl, which was a 600 acre hog and cash crop operation.

In 2014, Brett went on to study commerce at Queen's University. Even then, he spent much time on the train travelling back to the farm on weekends and for the summer. After two years at Queen's, Brett decided that he'd gained what he needed from school and moved back to Wallenstein to farm full-time.

With Brett's return to the farm, he brought new ideas and management practices. Growing up in Kitchener and during his time at university, Brett had heard what the urban consumer was asking for. He saw that certified organic products could meet the urban demand for quality, comfort and reliability. Jamie and Carl were open to Brett's ideas and they re-evaluated their business model and ethics.

3Gen Organics – named for the three generations who own and operate the farm – takes a holistic and systemsbased approach to farming. With this holistic approach, the Israels began to transition their entire operation to organic in 2015. Over the course of the next five years, they certified their hog operation and all their fields and continued to grow their business by renting new land in the area.

For them, the business case for organic certification was as strong as the ecological impact. "If we want to maintain a competitive family business that doesn't depend on loads of outside



Brett (left) with dad, Jamie in the hog barn summer 2020. Photo by Jodie Aldred.

support, we saw that we only had two means of competing," says Brett. "One is on volume and one is on quality. For us, it was about where are you going to play and how are you going to win."

The Israels decided to bet on quality over quantity. They didn't want to compete on volume by getting bigger. Growing certified organic grain and pigs allowed 3Gen Organics to remain competitive while maintaining a smaller operation. Not to say they haven't grown in recent years, but their growth has been within a scale that they can continue to operate as a family – from 600 acres in 2015 to close to 850 acres in 2020.

The growth has also supported their holistic principles and has been in large part due to their commitment to small grains. "When you're doing it well, it's fun and you need more land to play with," says Brett. Brett, Jamie and Carl don't run a defined standard rotation. They continue to grow corn and soy, but they love the way small grains and cover crops allow them to quickly adapt to weather and market changes. Integrating livestock into their operation has given them extra flexibility with the option to feed the cover crops.

Currently they grow soft red winter wheat, hard red spring wheat, winter and spring barley, cereal rye, hybrid rye, triticale and peas for forage production. Most of the grain and all of the forage is fed to the pigs, either fresh or ensiled. They are able to market most of their wheat locally through 1847, a Foodland Ontario artisan miller in Fergus.

"We have seen the dramatic impact that small grains can have in our rotation. I would say that now, our rotation is small grain centered. They provide us the best opportunity to pivot from one crop to another. We think that we can have



small grains follow any of the crops we grow and we have done so with great success. They have been one of the most consistently and repeatable high yielding crops on our farm."

The commitment to small grains and forages has allowed them to come very close to being a closed-system operation. The only things they bring in are seed and mineral premix – and occasionally some roasted soybeans.

They've also found many uses for cover crops, which help them meet two important goals: 1) to keep the ground covered as many days of the year as possible; 2) to make sure the land is still as good today as it will be for the next three generations of Israels who might want to grow on the land. "Tillage doesn't always have to be destructive, if it can be done with a low disturbance to get a good cover crop established," says Brett.

They are able to make cover crops work with any of their field crops and even



August cover crop growth in standing corn. They expect to harvest 150 bushels/acre off this field. Photo by Jodie Aldred.

seed a four-species blend into their standing corn while maintaining strong yields. "[The] cover crop looks great and helps break down corn residue, and we're still getting 150-180 bushel corn."

Despite some growing pains during the transition, the Israels are very pleased with the evolution of their operation and see a sustainable future for their business for many generations to come.

"You have to love what you do, and be excited about it. Our customers love seeing what we are doing to improve soil, water, and air quality "

As the Israels continue to look towards the future, they're also looking for ways they can support even more diversity on their farm. One of the ways they are looking to do this is through improved land access for other farmers. They are currently looking for farmers who might be interested in landsharing or even free rental of one of their smaller 6-12 acre fields. If you or someone you know is interested in such an opportunity, please contact Brett directly through their website at 3genorganics.ca.

Brett will be joining a Small Grains Meet-Up this winter. He will be sharing more information about their operation as well as answering questions on small grains, cover crops, and much more. If you or someone you know is interested in growing small grains, we encourage you to sign up for the Small Grains Network (page 9). To join the conversation or to sign up for the Small Grains Network, please visit efao.ca/small-grains.

### COMMUNITY

# **Tips For Moving Your Farm**

### By Peggy Baillie

Éric Blondin and Peggy Baillie operate Three Forks Farms in Gore Bay, on Manitoulin Island. They serve direct and wholesale markets with certified organic vegetables, pasture-raised chicken and garden seeds. They relocated their farm from Warren, ON (between Sudbury and North Bay) to Manitoulin Island in the Spring of 2020.

At some point in the life of a farm, there comes a good time to move. It could be to expand, downsize, own your own land or any number of reasons. In the fall of 2019, we realized that it was time for us to move, and started the wheels in motion. We did not expect that we would find our dream farm so quickly, nor that there would be a global pandemic happening during our move. None the less we did it, and we learned a lot in the process. As some of you may be thinking about a similar move, we wanted to share some of our insights. This is obviously from our perspective and experience but hopefully, there are some good takeaways.

First off, we decided to move our farm for a couple of major reasons. One is that our neighbours put their farm up for sale, which made us realize our farm was worth a lot more than we thought. The second was that we were isolated from family and friends, and swimming... (no joke). The third reason was that we were planning a major pivot at the farm that was going to require some new infrastructure and we always wanted to move the farm to Manitoulin to be closer to family, friends and swimming, so we figured now was the best time to do it. It has been a hard year, but in the end, I think it was totally worth it.

### So what did we learn... Physical Moving

We did the majority of the moving ourselves with our truck and trailers and then had our major equipment floated. I highly recommend the floating if you don't have a large truck yourself. Floating equipment involves using a special trailer that can haul large equipment. Float operators can be found in most regions and best found through Kijiji. The second thing I would say was we thought that moving our farm ourselves would not be that difficult, and in reality, it isn't that bad. But when you combine it with running an operating farm, and managing two properties at once, looking back it was too much. If I did it over again, I would have paid the money and bought a shipping container (which I want anyway) and paid to have it moved. When we compare the cost of gas, time and vehicle depreciation along with your physical and mental health, against the cost of a container I think it is a wash. Alternatively, I would have rented a large Uhaul for one week and did as much as I can in one week rather than spreading it out as it drains on you trying to manage the two properties.

### Equipment

Depending on where you are moving and the services available, I would recommend having all your equipment serviced prior to moving. Where you are now, you know where to get parts, who can do work etc. Where we moved we had to establish new relationships and



Peggy and Éric from Three Forks Farm on Manitoulin Island.

find the sources for many things and it was a huge problem when our equipment needed work, parts or was broken. It has taken us months to find a reliable tractor mechanic, and we still don't have a good parts supplier yet. Additionally, take stock of where you buy even small items like your containers, twine, and other materials and make sure you have enough to get you through for a good period of time until you can source new suppliers if needed. I realized when I got on the island that there were no printers or office supply places that carried the materials I used, so I had to start bulk ordering and buying online, which caused delays.

### Land Management

Hopefully you are moving in the fall so you are not top-loading your spring like we did. I would never do that again. I would recommend trying to get as much fieldwork completed in the fall on your new piece of land as possible, and then be realistic about how much you can do in the spring. When we moved to our new property this spring we put up more infrastructure in 6 weeks than we did in 4 years at our last place and it almost killed us. Plus your garden will be so much happier if you can do fall fieldwork.

### Markets

This may seem obvious but your markets may change depending on where you move. This can be for the



Peggy and Éric prepare to have their equipment floated to their new farm on Manitoulin Island.

better or for worse. Our recommendation is to be realistic in your first year, don't take on too much and do what you need to survive. Our first year here made us realize that we signed up for the wrong market, but also that there was a huge demand for on-farm sales. But still, with these changes, we didn't overcommit to anyone by satisfying all the needs, but sold what we could. Next year we will adapt to the better market conditions for our farm.

### Systems

As we build our farms, we build the systems that go with them. When the

land and infrastructure changes, the systems change also. Be prepared to have to adapt to the new space, change the systems you have now where needed and give yourself space and grace to move through that. On our new land, we had new irrigation systems, new water systems, and had to find new ways to do things that we did before like bin washing and staff management.

### Relationships

As a couple that works together, Eric and I depend on each other for a lot more than we realized. When we moved, I stayed at the old farm and Eric

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> came to the new farm. I packed and moved, Eric worked in the field and on infrastructure. I didn't think it would be that hard as we had spent a week apart before, but not being together and trying to accomplish so much independently was really hard. Emotionally it was very taxing. Our relationship is strong and we love each other. It was not about fighting but more about needing each other more than we realized. Again this is us, and you are you but don't take for granted how much you all support each other.

\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$



## 2020 Virtual EFAO Conference ROOTED & REACHING

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Rooted & Reaching by Laura Boyle

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This year's conference theme, *Rooted & Reaching*, speaks to the connection that farmers have with land and community, even in these uncertain times, while also recognizing the need to reach further for a more ecological, healthy and just agriculture and food system in Ontario.

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The **2020 Virtual Research Symposium** will take place as part of the conference on Monday November 30 from 11:00am to 12:30pm and 1:30pm to 3:00pm. The **Research & Seed Participatory Workshop** will take place on Thursday December 3 from 10:00am to 11:00am. The Symposium and the Participatory Workshop are included in both a Full Conference Pass and a Monday Pass.

### 2020 Virtual Conference Registration Rates Full Conference Pass:

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Full program and registration details at conference.efao.ca



SOIL

## EFAO's Pilot Soil Health Benchmark Study: Part 2

n 2019 EFAO piloted a Soil Health Benchmark Study. The study was funded by the Canadian Agricultural Partnership for farmers in the Lake Erie Basin and in collaboration with the National Farmers Union-Ontario Chapter 316 for farmers in the Kingston area.

In the first part of this two-part series, we summarized the usefulness of benchmark studies and detailed EFAO's Soil Health Benchmark Study (Part 1 – Summer 2020). In this issue, we will share the group's results from 2019 and next steps for continuing this program (Part 2 – Fall 2020).

As described in Part 1, 31 farms participated in the pilot study. Each farm selected three fields or areas of interest and chose three representative plots (i.e. replicates) per field, for a total 9 samples from every farm. We measured three indicators of soil health: organic matter (OM), active carbon (AC) and water infiltration. For more details on the design and the soil health indicators, see Part 1 at: efao.ca/soil-health-benchmark-2019-results.

By taking samples from three plots per field, we were able to analyze data from each farm in addition to the group's data. For the analysis of individual farms, we used a simple statistical model called the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) (footnote 1) to determine whether fields differed with respect to OM, AC and water infiltration. Summary statistics of the group's organic matter and active carbon data for 31 farms are shown in Table 1.

We detected these differences with 95% confidence, which means that if we took 100 samples we'd expect to see the difference 95 times. Of the 31 farms in the pilot study, 23 (74%) detected differences among fields. For the 8 farms (8%) that observed no detectable difference, one may exist but was too small to detect; or one may exist but there was too much variability among the replicate samples to discern a difference – i.e. we couldn't detect the "signal from the noise".



**Figure 1.** How well the three soil health indicators detected differences among fields on the 31 farms in this study.

To compare soil health differences among fields, the group's data revealed that OM was the most useful indicator followed by AC. Indeed, the majority of the 31 farms detected differences among fields using OM and AC, as shown in Figure 1. Water infiltration was useful on only one farm and, in general, farmerparticipants noted frustrations taking infiltration measurements including long and variable infiltration times. This might be because we took measurements in the fall, when the ground was too saturated. Intrigued by a relatively high AC value (500+ mg C/kg soil) for the sample with the lowest OM (1.6%), we also explored the OM:AC ratio by dividing OM by AC for each sample. (See efao.ca/soil-healthbenchmark-2019-results for supplement table of the group's OM:AC ratio data.)

Since AC denotes the small portion of OM that is usable by soil microbes as an energy source, relatively high values indicate that the soil microbial community is actively cycling nutrients and, in turn, stabilizing carbon and forming organic matter. In a game of "chicken or egg", we interpreted the higher ratio (i.e. high AC relative to OM) as evidence for active microbes that will eventually lead to detectable increases in OM. Only time will tell.

### Tracking soil health over time

Speaking of time, the first sampling year of a benchmark study is used to determine a baseline from which to assess future change in soil health and regeneration.

While many participants gained insights into how the soil health on their fields compared in 2019, the real power of this study will come in future years when the farmers re-sample the same areas and compare the new data to the 2019 baseline data.

When to sample next depends on specific management practices and any changes in practice. As a general rule of thumb, especially for those making dramatic changes in management, we suggested that participants might see changes in AC every three years and in OM every five years. As for the baseline samples, farmers will need to sample from at least three representative plots per field in order to run statistics and assess differences.

### What would you like to see come of the pilot Soil Health Benchmark Study?

A continuation and chance for more farms to participate? The opportunity for local groups to coordinate soil sampling? Including other indicators as part of the study? Meetings to collaboratively discuss results and regenerative farming?

We'd love to hear your thoughts! Please fill out the short feedback form found at: efao.ca/soil-health-benchmark-2019-results to guide the future of this important work.

**Table 1.** Summary statistics of the group's organic matter and active carbon data for 31 farms. Note that not enough data was collected to provide summary statistics for water infiltration.

Statistic	Organic matter (%)	Active carbon (mg C/kg soil)	AC : OM (ratio)
Minimum value	1.4 Sandy	264 Clay – clay loam	48 Organic (raised bed)
Mean	4.4	794	201
Maximum value	20.1 Organic (raised bed)	970 (unknown)	354 Sandy loam

- You can find a digital copy of the Soil Health Benchmark Study – Part 1 at efao.ca/soil-health-benchmark-2019results
- You can find a Soil Health Benchmark Report in the Research Library at efao.ca/research-library.
- You can find details of the pilot program and links to the protocols at efao.ca/soil-health-benchmark-study.

#### Footnotes:

To run the ANOVAs, EFAO staff used R statistical software, an open source statistical package. You can also run ANOVA as a function in standard spreadsheet programs and there are many free online sources including:

www.socscistatistics.com/tests/anova/ default2.aspx

goodcalculators.com/one-way-anovacalculator

### Other references:

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### **Membership Registration**

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# **Breaking The Rules**

When we started farming one of the rules was "get bigger or get out". We had purchased a 100-acre farm in 1973 and were learning how to farm and what our land would support. We didn't have any equipment so were trading our labour for the use of tractors, plows, discs, cultivators and grain drills to do our farming. I remember driving a nice new Leland tractor that belonged to a neighbour. I mean – this was a nice tractor - it started when you turned the key - you didn't have to put a screwdriver across the solenoid to get it to go. But as I was thinking about how nice it was I also got calculating that to buy such a tractor I'd need more land to justify the expense and if I bought more land I'd probably need to get a full-time off-farm job to pay for it. Though the tractor would let me do more work faster, the cost of it and more land would mean I'd have to do more work on and off the farm to pay for it.

This was certainly the time when the banks were inviting you to borrow money. About every 6 months we'd get a letter from our banker saying "farmland prices are going up - leverage that equity - we'll loan you money". Note they weren't saying farm product prices are going up and will stay up - you will have more income to REPAY those loans. So we could have borrowed the money against our land to buy a new tractor. But we didn't. Instead, we bought a team of horses with income from the farm and our part-time off-farm jobs. (We were sustaining ourselves and investing in the farm with a combination of farm income and off-farm income during the first 20 years on the farm.) We didn't need to take out a loan.

When a neighbouring farm directly across our road came up for sale we thought about it but decided not to buy it. We felt we were not managing our existing land base as creatively and carefully as we could. We already had enough woodlot – the extra barn space would require more investment in machinery to operate it, the extra house could turn into a liability in terms of maintenance and finding suitable tenants and we would rather have neighbours.

The rules we substituted for "Get bigger or get out" were "Get better and stay in" and "Think biologically not just industrially".

**Tony McQuail** Meeting Place Organic Farm

"Learn the rules like a pro, so you can break them like an artist"

.....

**Pablo Picasso** 

**'There's a boy in my class but he's rude.'** Rude is how my daughter Della would describe kids that didn't follow the rules at school. Back when she was in school. And in turn, I would silently give

thanks that it was easy for my kid to

follow the rules.

I want my children to know who made the rules, why they made the rules, and who the rules help. Ultimately, deep down inside, I'm a rule follower. I can easily connect with my inner firstgrader, the most simplistic of justice warriors. If everyone follows the rules, then it's fair, right? But it's not fair when the rules are made to work against you. Even I can see that, as a cis white woman in Canada.

I've always been uncomfortable with a hard sell. Black and white don't tell the whole story – I'm much more interested in the greys. Healthy questioning always leads to an exploration of the area between right and wrong, and anyone that is trying too hard to convince you that things are black and white is usually selling something or a political party.

My childhood was outside the norm, where we live. There's corn, soy, families that all know their neighbours and their uncles, and families have the same trucks in the same colours. My family farmed organically with draft horses, went to Quaker meeting, and then sold the car and drove a horse and buggy for 15 years in protest over oil wars and climate change. But the message was never 'f@\* the rules!' – if anything, my mother over follows the rules (she has a car now and drives steadily 10km under the speed limit – you can take the lady out of the buggy, but you can't take the buggy out of the lady). My childhood gave me the gift of living in the grey area - we weren't Amish, surrounded by like-minded community, my parents didn't smoke weed, so they weren't really hippies. But I did spend a lot of time (it takes a long time to get to town in the buggy) questioning the rules, who they applied to and why.

Recently the health department told me that I can sell my homemade frozen soup and pickles at a registered farmer's market but not pre-ordered and picked up on my farm. How does that make any sense? Adding a middleman to make sure it's safe? It's further away from my freezer!

Ultimately, I'm a collaborator. I like feeling like I'm a part of a team, working toward a common goal. I like to give in the spirit of generosity. Following the rules in some cases makes me feel that flush of self-affirmation, that I'm doing something for the common good. But some rules are made to protect big business, a few players that got together to protect each other from the competition, and as a scrappy small business...well.

Ellen Laing Orchard Hill Farm

### When I first heard the topic for Farmer Write was "Breaking the Rules" I thought of inspirational

farmers I was fortunate to know in my home state of Iowa, Dick and Sharon Thompson, the founders of Practical Farmers of Iowa. Dick had a saying "Get along, but don't go along." I think that speaks to flirting with the rules. A rule (whether as a policy or a mental constraint) is made when someone thinks they've got it all figured out. The Thompsons would teach there are typically "no quick answers or special recipes". Ideas should not be adopted from farm to farm, but rather adapted. So, break the rules, and as Dick would say: find out what works on your farm.

### Drake Larsen Three Ridges Ecological Farm

### Farmers Write is an opportunity for EFAO members and friends to share real-life short stories on topics inspired by life as a farmer.

The topics are intentionally broad – please feel free to express in a way that makes sense for you and your story. We aren't as concerned about style and perfect writing, as we are about great stories that others might find truth in as well. We suggest a word limit of 250 to 350 words but are happy to help edit a story. We are able to publish stories anonymously if that allows you to be freer in your writing.

To submit your story, please visit efao.ca/ farmers-write or send your typed, doublespaced submission to EFAO 5420 Hwy 6 North Guelph, Ontario N1H 6J2. Please include your email address and phone number. If you cannot type, please print clearly.

### **Upcoming Topics**

Winter 2021 – Good Advice

Deadline January 15





FOR ALL YOUR PACKAGING NEEDS

### **BOOK REVIEW**

## **Emergent Strategy by adrienne maree brown**

### **Review by Martina Schaefer**

"The world is in a constant state of flux...rather than steel ourselves against such change, this book invites us to feel, map, assess, and learn from the swirling patterns around us in order to better understand and influence them as they happen."

f you're reading this newsletter, you might, like me, be hoping to solve a problem in your work as an ecological farmer. You may have come to this work through learning about climate change, the industrial food system and all it entails, or a desire for a more fulfilling profession. You might also, like me, frequently feel burdened by the weight of the problems you're trying to do your small part to address. If that's the case, this book is for you.

I heard about adrienne maree brown through several respected friends whose values align with my own, some of whom are fellow land stewards and food producers. Although this book is not specific to farmers, part of the beauty of it is that its insights can be applied to many situations, including farming.

In my years as an avid reader and someone whose ethics drive much of what I do, I've soaked up books and documentaries, attended talks by people whose work I deeply respect and admire, and while all these things have been valuable, almost every experience emphasized the immense gravity of



whatever issue was at hand, with little offer of hope or potential solution.

I enjoyed and appreciated Emergent Strategy because it's just the opposite. This book approaches the work of changing the world from a position of curiosity, awe, and inspiration, while being grounded in the often difficult reality that change must – and does - happen. Each chapter focuses on a specific theme such as intentional adaptation, resilience, and interdependence, with pertinent examples from the natural world as openers. This is not a dry read, either it presents information in an applicable, accessible way, and includes tidbits from historical movement builders whose strategies were successful. The book directs questions to the reader, and provides exercises to guide us in funneling the turmoil of thoughts and feelings about whatever work we are doing into manageable parts of an intentional, values-driven strategy. Each chapter can be read as a stand-alone, and there's no need to read the book from front to back or all at once.

The final quarter contains a workbook for the reader to assess their own position, growth areas and skills, with the understanding that no one has every answer and everyone has something to contribute. These exercises can be done individually or in a group; empowerment, community connection and collaboration are foundational to the book's approach.

If you need a refreshing take on working through tough questions in a way that is grounded, intentional and realistic, I can't recommend this book enough.

Do you have a book that you would like to review? Please contact editor@efao.ca.

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