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Annual meeting shows QFA going strong



QFA President Chris Judd (right) with *Union des producteurs agricoles* President Christian Lacasse, following the latter's speech at the Quebec Farmers' Association's annual general meeting and information day at Macdonald Campus in Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue on November 6. More than 120 QFA members and Farm Management and Technology students from the agricultural college attended the day.

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Andrew McClelland
Advocate Staff Reporter

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The Quebec Farmers' Association celebrated another successful annual general meeting on November 6, as association members, industry representatives and Macdonald College agricultural students and faculty filled the Centennial Centre ballroom on Macdonald Campus in Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue.

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"We started this organization because of a lot of things we were seeing in agriculture," said Young. "Many farmers are increasingly of an older generation, while at the same time so much of our food is being imported. But there is a movement that's responding to this, and FarmStart is just one part of that movement."

The morning's information session also featured a keynote address by Charles Cantin, chief of Industry Outreach at the Strategic Policy Branch of Agriculture Canada. Cantin's presentation, "Growing Forward—How did we get here?" explained the process of building national agricultural policies, from the former Agricultural Policy Framework to today's Growing Forward programs like AgriInvest and AgriStability.

"The world of policy is complex," Cantin remarked. "Think of it this way: if you put your fork into your plate of spaghetti, can you predict which noodle will move first? Figuring out the effects of policy is the same."

Cantin's behind-the-scenes glimpse into the political forces

and trends that shape federal farm programs also showed agricultural producers in attendance how they can influence agriculture policy.

"The next farm policy will come in 2013, and I want you to know about it," said Cantin. "If you know about it, then you can participate and influence it."

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CONTINUED ON PAGE 11

Have you renewed your QFA membership?

Many QFA memberships run out in January!
Fill out our membership form on page 2 to renew.



Preach not to others what they should eat, but eat as becomes you, and be silent.

—Epictetus

What's a worker's value?

Ivan Hale

QFA Executive Director

Recently, I had an animated discussion with a successful farm owner. He was adamant that his farm—a large one by provincial standards—could not afford to pay workers as much as \$15.00/hour, and that offering fringe benefits was out of the question. My friend also believes that dedicated workers who do a good job deserve to be recognized for their contribution by being well paid, and that ideally they should share in the profits of a successful farm operation.

Despite my friend's considerable measure of success, his farm does not make a profit. Thus, any chance for improving his workers' benefits or wages is out of the question. Yet, he has always expected that his employees be available to work any time the job requires. (If on evenings or weekends then he would offer time off in lieu, or try to arrange for replacement workers.) And overtime? Forget about payment at time and a half. Over the past 20 years this man has had a history of frequent staff turnovers. He keeps searching for employees who have the same passion for farming that he has, but with little success.

During our lively discussion I was on the other side. I held the position that no farm will be profitable and retain loyal, dedicated staff as long as it continues to pay subsistence wages. (People do not like being among the “working poor” when others collecting employment insurance receive almost as much for doing nothing.) Also, I said that all workers deserve full protection in the workplace and that they should receive workers' compensation as well as employment insurance. I was equally adamant that the labour laws should be fully respected and adhered to. He pointed out that CSST is horribly expensive.

So who is right and where do you fit in? Let's look at some of the facts before deciding:

- The average weekly wage of full time farm workers in Canada in 2008 was \$633.62. The Quebec average was significantly lower at \$561.68. Over the past five years, the average income of farm labourers has grown steadily.
- In 2008, part-time farm workers in Quebec, those who work 30 hours or less a week at their main or only job, earned just \$166.28 a week, lagging behind the Canadian average of \$186.44.
- Quebec's *La Financière Agricole* uses complicated formulas to calculate costs of production for various commodities. For example, the owner/operator of a beef farm is assumed to earn an annual income of \$39,000.
- Quebec's minimum wage for agricultural workers is the same as that for other industries in the province: \$9.00/hour. However, due to the seasonal nature of farm work, agriculture labourers are not entitled to overtime pay.

Understandably, workers receiving low pay not only have trouble making ends meet, they frequently suffer from low self-esteem and feel unappreciated by their employers because they are not rewarded with higher wages. Such workers have trouble being self-motivated and rarely go “the extra mile”. Consider these real life scenarios. What's the “cost” to a farm if the herdsman does not pay attention to animals during winter or spring calving season and nine or 10

calves, and perhaps one to two cows, die as a result? How about the worker who regularly jumps on a tractor to cut or bale hay without checking fluid levels or greasing his machines, and causes premature parts failure that results in major delays in the operation and hefty repair bills. How many thousands of dollars could have been saved if this worker were well paid and content in his job?

Is the farmer who does not pay for workers' compensation prepared to pay for his liability if a worker is injured on the job? How many young aspiring farmers, perhaps sons and daughters of farmers, have been so discouraged by the low pay that they abandoned their dreams of becoming farmers?

My point is this: Is it real economy to pay our workers the bare minimum, or is it false economy? Ultimately, each of us must decide for him or herself. We each must live with the results of our decisions. But whatever we decide, let's remember that a little praise and encouragement goes a long way. Thank everyone who helps make your farm operation a success, including those unpaid family members who help out whenever needed. Please write to the paper with your experiences and opinions on this subject. We'd like to hear from you.

Annual meeting shows QFA going strong

Andrew McClelland

Advocate Staff Reporter

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The QFA was delighted to once again have *Union des producteurs agricoles* President Christian Lacasse on-hand to speak to association members. Lacasse addressed the challenges facing farmers across Quebec, and called on Premier Jean Charest and provincial Minister of Agriculture Claude Bécharde to continue consultations with the UPA concerning the future of *La Financière agricole du Québec*. The UPA president also stressed that the federal government be as strong as they have promised in defending supply management at the World Trade Organization.

"It is now time for the government to be accountable to agricultural producers," said Lacasse. "If the government and the minister of agriculture are as good as their word—if their analysis is as sound, and their intentions are as good as they claim—let them prove it."

Awards

The morning's activities were followed by a delicious catered lunch, which accompanied the Farm Management and Technology awards presentation. Program Director Peter Enright announced the names of the happy winners as Macdonald faculty handed out awards.

The QFA's Warren Grapes bursaries were also presented during the lunch. The Warren Grapes Agricultural Education Fund, inaugurated in honour of the former QFA president, supports students pursuing agricultural or silvicultural studies in Quebec and Canada. The fund awarded scholarships to nine Macdonald Campus students this year. Congratulations to recipients Meredith Closs, Regula Estermann, Dominique Kloeckner, Ben Nichols, Dale MacFarlane, Levi Mason, Jacob Morin, Colin Murphy and Marie-Pier Niewenhof!

The lunch was made more delicious thanks to the staff of agricultural consulting firm *Solutions Affaires Experts-Conseils* (SAEC), who doled out generous scoops of ice cream from the *Laiterie de Coaticook*.

Meeting

Bruce Patton of *Solution Affaires Experts-Conseils* kicked off the annual general meeting portion of the afternoon, speaking on behalf of company founder Robert Savage. Patton mentioned that SAEC was excited to embark on a partnership with the QFA and improve its services to Quebec's English-speaking community.

“Over the past 10 years, *Solution Affaires*' everyday work has involved helping farm owners to improve their performance and profitability of their businesses—while at the same time being mindful that being better doesn't necessarily imply being bigger,” said Patton.

Starting with this issue, SAEC will be writing a monthly column on farm finance for the *Advocate*—turn to page 11 to read the first instalment of this great new feature!

Following the reading and approval of the minutes of last year's annual general meeting, Chris Judd gave his report as association president. Judd spoke of the QFA's presence at farm lobby days, its continued support from Heritage Canada and the UPA, and the association's involvement with farm safety organizations.

“Over the years, I can think of the names of 20 people who've died on farms in Pontiac County alone,” said Judd. “That's way too many. And if we can help the UPA to continue its action in farm safety, we'll definitely have done our bit to reduce farm fatalities in Quebec.”

John McCart also stepped up to the mike to give his report as QFA treasurer. McCart thanked the QFA executive for their efforts that have resulted in a healthy financial year for the QFA, and expressed his gratitude to the UPA for its unflagging support.

“This was a really easy job to take over,” said McCart. “I became treasurer when the association had once again started making money after a few rough years. And today, we're still making money.”

Membership Committee Chair Bill Fairbairn noted that 2009 was a good year for membership increases, and QFA Director of Operations Wendy Jones unveiled the association's brand-new website, now online at www.quebecfarmers.org

In his executive director's report, Ivan Hale spoke of the many developments that occurred in the 2008-2009 year. Hale mentioned two recent bursaries awarded to the QFA from both the Catherine Donnelly Foundation and the Toronto Dominion Bank's “Friends of the Environment” Foundation.

The QFA executive director also reported on the progress of the association's World Foods Initiative, which was introduced to the QFA membership at last year's annual meeting.

“The purpose of this initiative is to assist new farmers including new Canadians to realize their farming dreams as they embark on their paths,” said Hale. “Over the next year, we will be beginning some fields trials of vegetables that are typically grown in warm climates to serve the fast-growing immigrant population in the country.”

Hale outlined the QFA’s extensive involvement with farm safety groups in Canada, including its participation with the UPA and the *Commission de la santé et de la sécurité du travail* (CSST) in publishing safety pamphlets and info sheets to inform agricultural producers on how to prevent accidents around the farm.

The meeting was followed by a wine-and-cheese reception, as QFA members, staff and industry representatives mingled at the end of an enjoyable day. The QFA would like to thank Canadian Heritage, *La Terre de Chez Nous*, the *Ministère de l’Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l’Alimentation du Québec*, The Canadian Farm Business Management Council, McGill University, *Solution Affaires Experts-Conseils*, *La Financière agricole*, Saputo, Agropur, La Coop fédérée, Shur-Gain, *La Fédération des producteurs de pommes de terre du Québec*, *Centre d’Insemination artificielle du Québec*, *La Fédération des producteurs de bovins du Québec*, *Pommes Qualité Québec*, *La Fédération des producteurs de cultures commerciales du Québec*, synAgri, Purina, *La Fédération des producteurs acéricoles du Québec*, Homestead Organics, *Pommes Qualité Québec*, *La Fédération des producteurs de volailles du Québec*, *Clinique Vétérinaire de Coaticook*, and Ottawa Valley Seed Growers for their generosity in sponsoring the event.

Levinoff-Colbex—concrete action needed at all levels

Michel Dessureault
President
FPBQ

Not surprisingly, Levinoff-Colbex has got cattle producers talking these days. And their concerns are more than justified. While being of significant importance to cull cattle producers, the abattoir’s financial situation remains difficult. This is due, in large part, to the unfavourable conditions that have persisted in the beef market over the past two years: notably the Canadian regulations concerning SRMs (which do not exist in the United States), an historic and unprecedented decrease in the volume of cull cattle, as well as the collapse of the market for carcass by-products, due to the global economic recession.

It is, in fact, the perfect storm. Nevertheless, the worst thing we could do would be to sit on our hands and wait to see what happens. The abattoir’s managers, its board of directors, as well as

the *Fédération des producteurs de lait du Québec* (FPBQ), have all become actively engaged to weather this hostile climate.

Thanks to Quebec's traceability system, Levinoff-Colbex has recently signed a contract with the Japanese company, Zensho. It specifies steers less than 21 months of age, born, raised and slaughtered in Quebec. This project was made possible through the persistent work of the abattoir's management. Among other things, new equipment had to be installed and numerous federal inspection requirements had to be met, as well as the training of personnel to cut up the carcasses according to the client's specifications. Additional support came from the Slaughter Cattle Marketing Agency, which negotiated the terms and conditions with Zensho. All of these efforts brought positive results. And although the project is a modest one, the first cuts of meat were delivered to Zensho in early October.

Along with this, the Levinoff-Colbex board of directors has submitted a modernization project of its infrastructures (integrated plant) within the framework of the federal government's Slaughter Improvement Program. The completion of this project would reduce operating costs and develop new activities. The federal program covers part of the cost, but not all of it. To complete the funding, other financial partners are being approached. In this regard, the provincial minister of agriculture, Claude Béchar, has promised to take the necessary steps with his government in order to ensure the sustainability of the abattoir. For this, we are very grateful and are confident we will obtain positive results in the near future.

In addition, efforts are continuing with the federal government regarding the subject of Specified Risk Materials (SRM). You may recall that this regulation, which came into effect in 2007, has resulted in recurring annual costs of between \$4 to \$6 million for Levinoff-Colbex. On the other hand, our American competitors do not incur these additional expenses. At its last meeting in September, the National Beef Value Chain Round Table reiterated the absolute necessity to establish a financial support program.

Furthermore, federal Minister of Agriculture Gerry Ritz recently acknowledged in a letter to the Canadian Meat Council that the SRM regulations have put an extra burden on the industry. He also admitted that the costs are higher than what was originally estimated when the regulations were put into effect. But acknowledgements are not enough. Concrete action is required to support the industry and save the few remaining cull cattle abattoirs that still operate in Canada.

Finally, the Cull Cattle Marketing Agency has implemented an action plan to ensure an efficient supply of cull cattle to the abattoir. This action plan has several components, such as optimizing transportation, reinforcing the legal aspects of our single channel marketing system, as well as negotiating the marketing agreements with the auctions, which expire on December 31, 2009. Among other objectives, these actions are designed to ensure a maximum supply of Quebec cows to the Levinoff-Colbex abattoir.

As you can see, the FPBQ is working on every where it has some influence. But we cannot do it alone. The participation of producers is essential. We must send our cows to our own abattoir. We must be coherent in our individual and collective decisions. And it is necessary for governments to support us without delay, through concrete actions. The federal government must

intervene to eliminate the financial burden caused by the SRM regulations. The provincial government must help, in conjunction with the federal government, in financing the integrated plant project. If not, the future of the sole cull cattle abattoir in Eastern Canada is at risk.

The feeder-calf market...from August until mid-October

Eve Martin, agronome
Feeder-calf Marketing and Development Officer
FPBQ

The specialized auction circuit for feeder calves started again on August 28. For the period from the end of August until mid-October, volumes have been lower than last year. The new income stabilization insurance procedures for feeder calves may partially explain this reduction in volume. Since calves weighing less than 500 pounds are no longer covered, it is possible that a certain lag time is required to allow calves to put on the necessary extra weight to receive their share of compensation.

Table 1 shows the difference in prices between 2009 and 2008 for the same fall period. It can be seen that male castrated calves between 500 and 600 pounds had an average price decrease of \$5.18/100 lb at the start of the 2009-2010 season, compared to the same period in 2008-2009. Prices obtained since the beginning of the fall are a reflection of the difficult market conditions right across the country. Among other things, the strength of the Canadian dollar and the low cost of animal protein are putting downward pressure on the price of slaughter steers and this, in turn, is reflected in the price of feeder calves.

Table 1: Price of feeder calves in Quebec, Alberta and Manitoba; autumn 2008 and 2009, \$/100lb¹

| | | Quebec | | | Alberta | Manitoba |
|-----------------------|-------|--------|--------|------------------------|---------|----------|
| | | 2008 | 2009 | Difference (2009-2008) | 2009 | 2009 |
| Castrated male calves | 5-600 | 120.89 | 115.71 | -5.18 | 110.29 | 107.58 |
| | 6-700 | 116.08 | 111.94 | -4.14 | 106.61 | 101.72 |
| | 7-800 | 110.55 | 106.09 | -4.46 | 102.86 | 96.95 |
| Female calves | 5-600 | 102.44 | 97.50 | -4.94 | 95.99 | 93.26 |
| | 6-700 | 99.25 | 94.61 | -4.64 | 94.02 | 91.43 |
| | 7-800 | 95.43 | 89.27 | -6.16 | 92.18 | 89.57 |

¹ From August 1 to October 12.

A Friday afternoon in December

Come and listen to *Canada's Outstanding Young Farmers* present their farm enterprises at the Chateau Laurier in Ottawa

**Vincent McConnell, agronome
Agro-Environmental and Farm Establishment Advisor
MAPAQ, Outaouais sector**

For more than five years now, I have had the opportunity annually to recharge my batteries and be captivated by the achievements of the young farmers participating in Canada's Outstanding Young Farmers Program. It is certainly very stimulating to see what these young people have accomplished in their livestock, field crop, horticultural and other specialty crop productions.

Program overview

Canada's Outstanding Young Farmers Program is designed to recognize young farmers that exemplify excellence in their profession. Eligible nominees must be farm operators between the ages of 18 and 39, who derive a minimum of two-thirds of their income from their farm operations. Each year one farming couple is selected from each of the program's seven Regional Recognition Events to represent their respective region at the National Recognition Event. At the National Event, the seven honourees are recognized for their achievements and judged by a distinguished panel of judges using the following criteria:

- Progress made during their farming career
- Maximum utilization of soil, water and energy conservation practices
- Crop and livestock production history
- Financial and management practices
- Contributions to the well-being of the community, province and nation

Each year, two of the seven honourees are chosen by the judges as Canada's Outstanding Young Farmers.

Reference: Website <http://www.oyfcanada.com> – Canada's Outstanding Young Farmers Program, About OYF, program overview.

Remember this date

The introduction of the competition finalists will take place on Friday, December 4, 2009 from 1 pm to 4 pm at the Chateau Laurier in Ottawa; this part of the event is open to everyone. Using visual aids, the participants will explain the aspects that motivate them and will describe the various stages in the development of their enterprises, with emphasis on their factors for success.

I encourage everyone, young and old, to attend these Friday presentations. You will be both delighted and touched by the candidates' positive thinking and ideas.

For further information, visit the website <http://www.oyfcanada.com> or contact Vincent McConnell, by e-mail at Vincent.McConnell@mapaq.gouv.qc.ca .

Proposals are being studied for genetic evaluation programs for beef

Currently, the *Ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation du Québec* (MAPAQ) is administering on-farm and test station genetic evaluation programs. The bull test station network annually tests close to 1,000 bulls of different breeds. At the end of the test, bulls that meet the criteria of the evaluation program obtain a superior genetic certificate, which indicates their superior quality in comparison to the average of their group. The admissibility of each bull, along with the test procedures and criteria set out to obtain a superior genetic certificate, are upheld by MAPAQ regulations. The evaluation programs take into account both the concerns of breeders who are willing to test their bulls as well as those of potential buyers.

During several workshops held in 2008 and 2009, the Steering Committee of the *Comité consultatif provincial pour l'amélioration des bovins de boucherie* (CCP) examined the regulations and conditions for issuing a superior genetic attestation certificate (blue or gold certificates) for bulls tested either in test stations or on the farm. This work led to a series of proposals which aim at modifying the qualification procedures for superior genetics, as discussed at the delegates' general meeting held last June in Drummondville.

All these proposals will be examined and analysed in detail by genetic specialists, as requested by the MAPAQ advisors responsible for test stations. At the end of this analysis, new regulations will be established. The 2009-2010 test season will begin under regulations similar to those currently in effect.

SURVEY OF ESTABLISHED YOUNG FARMERS

Some highlights concerning the Outaouais region

The survey, conducted in 2006, was answered by 169 young farmers in the Outaouais region:

- In order to establish themselves in farming, 45.7 per cent of the region's young farmers chose to start up a new farm enterprise, compared to 26.8 per cent for the province, in general;
- 25.2 per cent of the Outaouais region's young farmers obtained a university diploma, while at the provincial level, this proportion was 9 per cent;
- While for Quebec as a whole, the majority of farmers established themselves in dairy production (38.5 per cent), in the Outaouais region, the majority started up in beef production (37.2 per cent);
- 57 per cent of established young farmers in the Outaouais region have used MAPAQ's advisory services, while at the provincial level, this percentage is 38.7 per cent;

- Finally, the proportion of female farmers in the region has reached 28.5 per cent, compared to 24 per cent for all of Quebec.

The complete results of this study are published in a document entitled “*Portrait de la relève agricole établie 2006.*” This document is available on the MAPAQ website www.mapaq.gouv.qc.ca under the heading “*Établissement et relève*” or you may obtain a copy at your local agricultural service centre.

It’s a crazy idea!”

Christian Lacasse
UPA President

“For our pork sector, the situation is catastrophic. During 22 of the past 24 months, farmers have been operating in the red, with prices below their total costs. Furthermore, during 19 of these 22 months, prices did not even cover the variable costs!” This is what an American farmer declared recently while presenting a portrait of the situation in the United States at the 34th *Conference on Agriculture of North America and the European Union*, an event held every two years and most recently in Niagara Falls.

A representative from the National Farmers Union (U.S.) also related the fact that dairy producers have been approaching him for assistance and all he could suggest was for them to apply for “food stamps” in order to feed their families! A farmer from France reported that their Single Payment Scheme, which was created during the reform to decouple subsidies, does not come close to compensating for the decrease in prices obtained by dairy farmers, compared to the increase in retail prices (-6 per cent versus 17 per cent since 2000). The European Court of Auditors (equivalent to our Auditor General) has corroborated this fact in a recent report and emphasized, among other things, that deregulation has led the government to increase its financial assistance for this production sector, in spite of the reform, to the tune of 41 per cent of income even before the most recent milk crisis.

This decoupling of subsidies [unlinked to production] in favour of a single payment scheme is, as it turns out, the same type of revision that the Pronovost Commission proposed for ASRA. We can now see the results: a catastrophe! One of France’s most visible citizens, reputed to be rather right-wing, has since declared regarding these reforms: “The idea of the almighty market that must not be influenced in any way by regulations or political interventions – it is . . . a crazy idea.” This citizen is none other than Nicolas Sarkozy (that’s right!), who, only last Friday called on the European Committee to strengthen the tools that regulate the dairy market and even remarked that “the subsidies given to the various value chains should more strongly encourage farmers to group together, in order to counterbalance the other stakeholders in the marketing chain.” You can be sure that an increasing number of French farmers are now looking at us as an example.

It is not surprising, therefore, to have heard numerous times at the Niagara Falls conference that all of these major reforms have not worked (WTO, European Common Agricultural Policy, etc.): in fact, they weaken our enterprises and leave agriculture disorganized to face industry players upstream who are ever more consolidated. The dairy crisis in France is a prime example. However, while the Europeans have been dealing with the high cost of social chaos, brought about by policies that led to the loss of billions of dollars to their agricultural sector's revenues, here in Quebec, we are currently playing a dangerous game with the future of the tools that have allowed our farmers to better resist the economic storm that has been pounding the entire "agricultural planet." Hello...?

The Pronovost Commission did not have an eye to the future when it recommended the European example. Rather, it was looking in the rear-view mirror! Instead of saying that we should be doing the same as everyone else, we should rather be congratulating ourselves for having provided ourselves to some valuable tools – tools that have allowed Quebec's agriculture to be in a better position, both within Canada and worldwide. Now that these tools are being called upon to respond (which is normal) to the enormity of the crisis, it should not be concluded that they are not working. On the contrary, they are working! They are preventing numerous farmers from disappearing by providing them with a safety net, in order that they may bounce back once the storm has passed. That is, on the condition that we have been intelligent enough to conserve them rather than succumb to the almighty market... "Just a crazy idea!"

LTCN 2009-11-05

\$9.6 million to save Levinoff-Colbex abattoir

The federal government has just paid out the first \$9.6 million under its new Slaughter Improvement Program, an election promise with a budget allotment of \$50 million. The first recipient: Levinoff-Colbex, the biggest cull cattle abattoir in Eastern Canada, owned by Quebec's cattle producers.

The money will be used to build a new processing line, required for the slaughter of steers for Japan—a recent project started in October, with a potential for 1,000 head/week.

"Our government has shown that it has been listening to cattle producers," explained Jean-Pierre Blackburn, federal minister of revenue and minister of state for agriculture. "Without this \$9.6 million, Levinoff-Colbex would not have been able to get very far." The interest-free loan is reimbursable only if the business shows a profit. The funding may reach \$9.6 million if the abattoir meets certain conditions, including an important financial restructuring.

“The \$9.6 million is conditional on following the complete business plan,” Blackburn explained. “Within the plan, there are other partners, including the Quebec government. We are the first of several to come to the table.”

According to Blackburn, the Quebec government is favourable to Ottawa’s participation, and may be tempted to follow suit. The abattoir’s \$34 million renewal plan calls for a contribution by Quebec of \$14 million. The province’s cattle producers have already voted to reinvest \$30 million into their slaughter plant.

“It is with much enthusiasm that the producers welcome this announcement,” declared the president of the *Fédération des producteurs de bovins du Québec* (FPBQ), Michel Dessureault. “Today, we have received good news—but before the digging starts, there remains much to do,” added Serge Michel, the chairman of the abattoir’s board of directors.

Michel and his colleagues must continue to negotiate with the federal government to introduce a financial aid program for the removal of specified risk material (SRM), a key factor in the renewal plan. The SRM adds a cost of about \$32/head, for a total of more than \$4 million per year. Levinoff-Colbex must compete with their American counterparts, who do not have to conform to such costly rules.

“It is a reality that we have to contend with this difference in cost, since the regulations are less stringent in the United States. We are looking for a permanent solution,” explained Blackburn.

“What makes it worse is that the Americans come here and buy our cows, bring them back home to process and then come back here to sell the meat,” complained the FPBQ president. According to him, the government must come up with a short-term solution, without which “our industry will not survive.”

There are only two cull cattle abattoirs remaining in Canada, Dessureault emphasized. Will the solution be to harmonize our regulations with those of the U.S. or a financial support program? “There is no simple answer,” admitted Blackburn.

For 2009, Levinoff-Colbex anticipates a deficit. “The beginning of the year was very difficult. We have become profitable during the last few months, but we expect a substantial loss,” concluded the board chairman. The SRM requirements, the financial crisis that caused the market for cow hides to plummet and the decreased volume of cull cattle available are the chief causes.

Julie Mercier
LTCN 2009-10-29

UPA is sticking to its guns

The UPA is sticking to its guns when it comes to the legitimacy of the single union accreditation for Quebec's agricultural producers.

"I repeat that farmers have every advantage to join a single organization to face present and future challenges," asserted UPA President Christian Lacasse in reaction to the declaration by the *Coalition pour la liberté d'association agricole du Québec* (CLAAQ) [Coalition for freedom of association in agriculture in Quebec]. "We do not need to repeat the errors that others have made elsewhere, when we already have a system that gives good results. On the contrary, we must promote it rather than abolish it," he declared.

Lacasse continued by saying that the *Union paysanne* (UP) missed out on an excellent opportunity to defend farmers in a concrete way during the negotiations on the Interior Trade Agreement (ITA).

"I would have liked to see the UP at our side in our fight regarding the ITA," he stated to the newspaper *La Terre de chez nous* on October 26. "In the North-American context that favours the industrial model, the family farm that the UPA is defending will be the first to suffer if there is a decrease in the ability of farmers to organize against the consolidation of buyers and distributors. The absence of the UP on this issue is probably the reason why farmers are less and less attracted to its message."

In Lacasse's opinion, the *Union paysanne's* declaration on single union accreditation is not disconnected to the fact "that it has reached a ceiling in its membership and its ideas." The UPA president also remarked that "it is not necessarily the general welfare of farmers that concerns the grain producers and the maple syrup processors who are members of the Coalition. Are they defending the interests of the farmers, or rather the industrialists? I would be very uncomfortable, if I were the *Union Paysanne*, to count on this membership to promote my cause."

Lacasse also added that the downplaying of the UPA's membership percentage must end. "Our percentage has been constantly increasing over the past five years, which indicates that young farmers are joining our organization, in spite of the messages sent by the UP and a number of other reports." He also remarked that a farmer can, at any time, decide to discontinue his or her membership in the UPA.

Jean-Charles Gagné
LTCN 2009-10-29

UPA in agreement with strengthening agricultural laws

If the objective of the Quebec government is to strengthen the agricultural laws, the *Union des producteurs agricoles (UPA)* has indicated that it is ready to participate in the drafting of an all-encompassing law that would amalgamate all of the laws affecting the agricultural sector. UPA president, Christian Lacasse, says he does not see the invitation by Quebec's minister of agriculture, Claude Béchard, in a negative light. He sees it as an opportunity to correct certain inconsistencies, such as obtaining agricultural producers' status for wood producers.

“We must take the time to sit down with the minister and find out what his real intentions are. If the objective is to strengthen the laws and at the same time to create a vision for the future, where the foundations for an agricultural policy will be better anchored in the Bill, we will be on board. However, if the objective is to use this exercise to make major changes to the laws that would result in weakening the rights of farmers with regard to the marketing of our products or the protection of agricultural land, we will oppose it!”

Lacasse has reserved judgement regarding the timing of the minister's call to begin these reflections within his ministry. The UPA president would rather focus on the objectives and anticipated results of the exercise, saying that in his opinion, it is essential to remain in a “constructive” mode. He is convinced that it is possible to achieve worthwhile results, on condition that the two parties have common objectives. Unfortunately, he recalled that experiences over the past two years have given the UPA reason to be sceptical.

Lacasse also indicated that he will participate in this effort, if Minister Béchard's intention is to strengthen the rights of farmers in terms of marketing and their ability to obtain fair prices—that is, a better distribution of profits among all stakeholders. He also believes that with regard to the protection of agricultural land, it is necessary to put more emphasis on the preparation of development plans for agriculture and forestry, which should aim for the optimal use of tillable land and the private forest.

“The minister seems to be saying that there will be a strengthening [of the laws],” Lacasse reiterated. “I will give him the benefit of the doubt, insofar as he can demonstrate that there will be concrete improvements as a result. The agricultural sector has been hard hit over the past several years. If this Bill is part of a new policy to ensure the sustainability of agriculture and of our rural regions for the next ten to fifteen years, we are ready to participate in the exercise.”

Financière agricole

After a cooling of relations, the UPA and the agriculture minister have renewed their contact this week. Two meetings have been scheduled in order to finalize negotiations regarding the renewal of the *Financière agricole* agreement. A preparatory meeting was held on November 2 and a top-level work session involving the Agriculture Minister, Claude Béchard and the UPA president, Christian Lacasse was scheduled on November 5.

The UPA president recalled that these meetings are a follow-up to the promise made by Premier Jean Charest, to come up with concrete proposals to the satisfaction of agricultural producers. As previously announced last week, the work of the bipartite (government-UPA) committee was terminated in June. Minister Bécharde still intends to conclude the *Financière agricole* issue this month.

“It is essential that we remain involved in this exercise,” declared Lacasse. “Farmers have to contribute one-third of the cost. We must resolve this issue regarding *La Financière* once and for all and we will be happy to sit down again with the ministry.”

Pierre-Yvon Bégin
LTCN 2009-11-05

Not a hectare more to lose in Outaouais-Laurentides

The protection of agricultural land, the situation of the Levinoff-Colbex abattoir and the new agreement concerning *La Financière agricole* were all subjects that fuelled discussions at the annual general meeting of the *Fédération de l'UPA Outaouais-Laurentides* on October 23 in Gatineau.

“The government did not take kindly to having been told that it did not show leadership; it has proceeded to produce reports like a hen laying eggs, without consulting farmers,” declared Richard Maheu, the federation’s president in his speech to delegates. “The government is determined to re-open the law regarding the protection of the agricultural zone and to give more powers to the municipalities. The law does not have to be made softer, not at all.” Maheu called on the government to oblige the municipalities to complete their development plans before giving them any more power.

The president of the *Union des producteurs agricoles (UPA)*, Christian Lacasse, went further in his presentation. “Do not let your guard down by thinking that in re-opening the law, it will be to strengthen it,” he warned. We know very well that if it is re-opened, it will be to weaken it. We must remain vigilant. We do not have a hectare more to lose – it is the food pantry of Quebec.

Maheu also spoke about the precarious situation of the Levinoff-Colbex abattoir. “Are we going to decide to send our cattle there?” he questioned. “If the abattoir closes, the debt will still belong to us.” Christian Lacasse added that he deplored the new regulations that prohibit any specified risk material (SRM) in animal feed and fertilizers. The Canadian government, while attempting to re-establish its reputation, handed a competitive advantage to the Americans. The financial impact of this on Levinoff-Colbex is in the order of 5 to 6 million dollars, according to the union

leader. “Supply is also a problem. We are not getting a lot of the cows,” he declared. “Farmers must make the choice to ship their cows to the abattoir that they are paying for.”

Concerning the renewal of the *Financière agricole* agreement, the UPA president indicated that he has not had any meetings with the government on this subject since last July. He assured delegates that he did not plan to budge with regard to the \$650 M funding envelope. “Since 1990, producers have had the same budget. Agricultural revenues have almost doubled during this period!”

Delegates at the general meeting passed about a dozen resolutions. In order to solve the problem of a lack of veterinarians, they suggested, in particular, that MAPAQ accept veterinarians from Ontario. They also called on their federation to make accident prevention one of its top priorities. The delegates emphasized the importance of the advertising campaign “Pas de nourriture sans agriculture” (No food without agriculture]. Moreover, they would like to see more money put into this type of campaign which targets the general public, in order to promote the profession and to “buy local.”

Marie-Claude Poulin

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