

**Rainy River Federation of Agriculture  
Rainy River District Agriculture Framework Paper  
Summary of the 2005 Strategic Planning Process**

Completed for Rainy River Federation of Agriculture  
September 2005

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## Executive Summary

In January 2005 RRFA initiated a strategic planning process. The goal was to see what was going on in the agriculture community and identify ideas, initiatives and concerns in the agriculture community that the RRFA could assist, encourage and/or facilitate. The general feeling of the RRFA being that if we are not looking to go forward we are likely going to be going backward. Once this process began unfolding and recorded the RRFA, as well as, all other agriculture associations, groups or individual would have a solid overview for the Ag sector being this paper (Agriculture Economic Framework). The Framework would support their efforts to attain outside assistance in proceeding with their initiatives. Initially a one-day event was organized to review the strengths weakness needs, opportunities and action plans (SWAT analysis). This was too ambitious for a one-day meeting, so two additional days were organized. After reviewing the SWAT analysis the action plans appeared to fall into three main categories of effort - **Encouraging Alternative crops and products, Adding value to products** and improving the **communication plan** and education around agriculture in the district. The Agriculture Economic Framework paper has tried to report all the ideas that were presented in the three days of Workshop. If something was overlooked, contact the Federation and it will gladly be included. One thing became evident from the workshops. Workshop attendees have a vision for the district they want to see:

“A diverse, vibrant and sustainable agriculture sector contributing as an important economic driver in the district over the long term.” The challenge for the RRFA will be to encourage the various groups, people and agencies to take the information generated and encourage activities that will move us towards the vision.

The RRFA believes that starting this process itself has been very worthwhile. Without any direct encouragement from the RRFA a number of very positive actions have taken place over the spring and summer by the Cattlemen's, Clover Valley Farmers' Market and the Milk Committee. Starting in September the RRFA will review the Framework paper and determine it's own role and possible partnerships to encourage the actions suggested.

## **Introduction**

The following paper is the proceedings, findings and initiatives that resulted from the three day planning process hosted by The Rainy River Federation of Agriculture (RRFA). This is a good start for a strategic agriculture plan for the Rainy River District.

## **Background**

On January 13, 2005 a one-day Community Summit was held in Fort Frances to examine issues that will impact the Rainy River District over the next five years. Presentation and discussions were centred on the key areas of commerce, industry, education, agriculture and health care.

One of the results of the Community Summit was the realization that additional planning and initiatives may be needed to support the agricultural industry in the region. In an effort to address this need, The Rainy River Federation initiated a strategic planning process. One workshop was organized and all segments and stakeholders in Agriculture were invited to attend all sessions. The Rainy River Future Development Corporation sponsored this initial meeting. The goal of the workshop was to review the strengths, weakness needs, opportunities and action plans (SWAT analysis). This was too ambitious for a one-day meeting, so two additional days were organized. This three day- three part planning process is the first step in the strategic planning process. It is the hope and intent of the RRFA that this process will assist groups and individuals to develop ideas that will contribute to making our agricultural community a diverse and vibrant economic driver in the district.

## **The Workshops**

### March 30, 2005

This was a full day workshop hosted and organized by RRFA, sponsored by RRFDC and facilitated by Edward Hoshizaki and Peder Olsen of Edward Hoshizaki Development Consulting. Fifty people attended the workshop. Most in attendance were actively involved in agriculture, with approximately 70% of those in cattle. In addition there were representatives of both the local Federal and Provincial Members of Parliament, and the local media present. The day consisted of a Welcome from Trish Neilson President RRFA, a keynote speech from Jim Cummings Coordinator of the summit and Chair of the Regional Economic Development Committee (REDC), an Overview of Agriculture in Rainy River and then group discussions of Strengths and Weaknesses, Needs and Opportunities and Rank Actions... Next Steps.

The issue of the day was the development of an Abattoir and this opportunity was discussed at length. A summary of this discussion is included in the report. Based on the outcome of the March 30 meeting the RRFA organized further meetings, to discuss, in more detail, other opportunities and Issues facing the district.

### Workshop 2 - April 22, 2005

This was a 3-hour afternoon session hosted and sponsored by the RRFDC. This Session concentrated on the needs and opportunities of the district. Findings of the March 30 meeting were reviewed, needs and opportunities were listed and then prioritized. The President of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture participated in the discussions. Some additional needs and opportunities were generated. 9 people attended. Based on the outcome of this meeting, a third session was planned to discuss an action plan for the ideas that resulted from both sessions.

### Workshop 3 - May 24, 2005

This was a 4-hour evening session to develop action plans. Findings of the March 30 and April 22 were reviewed. Action plans for the opportunities identified in the April meeting were developed. 14 people attended this session:

### **Findings**

#### **District Strengths**

##### **Infrastructure**

When identifying local strengths a number of the strengths were, in fact, facilities or services that have been established in the region to serve the agricultural community. The following were identified:

- Border Inspection Station
- Cattle Sales Yard
- University of Guelph – Emo Research Station
- Port of Entry
- Farmers Market
- Seed Cleaning
- Bulk Fertilizer
- Community Pasture

##### ***Other local strengths identified were as follows:***

- Despite all the challenges things can be done. There are successes that were told they would fail, as an example: Thunder Oak Cheese
- The region as a “pristine environment” that may have an economic/market appeal. The region may be able to brand itself – “Rainy River Brand”. Such a branding comes with the challenges of living up to outside/market ideals
- Grass feeding of cattle is economical and possible in Rainy River. Grass fed beef is an emerging/high value market
- Land prices are still economically viable for agricultural uses
- There is a very strong commitment to farming – local values
- The region is small enough to organize, plan, and work together
- The region is a destination, a gateway, and a transportation hub
- The relative isolation of the region allows varied crops to be grown (i.e. crop separation is not as large an issue as elsewhere)
- There are a number of alternative products being produced in the region (e.g. elk, bison)
- Most farmers are also working off the farm
- Local organizations – Rainy River Federation of Agriculture, Rainy River Cattlemen’s Association,

#### **District Weaknesses**

##### ***The following were identified as local weaknesses:***

- Too many and too onerous rules and regulations from government and others (e.g. marketing boards etc...) on farmers.
- High input costs with no local control or options

- Processors, suppliers & government do not understand or listen
- Increasing competitive pressures and world markets
- District land is being removed from agricultural uses for hunting areas, woodlots, and residences. Farmers find it hard to compete.
- Lack of active support in the agricultural community for others trying to do something. There needs to be an active and unified voice from farmers.
- If Rainy River is going to try and brand and sell itself, it needs to address how it looks to others - particularly tourists. Identified issues include:
  - Much of fencing along the highway is in disrepair – apparently these were originally installed by the government
  - Brush has grown along the highway and needs to be cleared
  - Many unused lots are in disrepair and no replanting is taking place
- No local option for processing cattle (Abattoir)
- Local markets are relatively small (Rainy River and North-western Ontario)
- Farmers are forced to work off the farm to make a living (this was also noted as a strength – showing the commitment to farming and adding resiliency to farming)
- Not enough farmers involved in value added products or controlling their products further along the sales/market chain
- National issues – BSE, US boarder closed to cattle, and depressed cattle prices

### **Issues and Opportunities:**

- Alternative Crops
  - Wheat, Herbs, Hybrid Poplar, Forage Seed, Fruit Trees, Vegetables, Switch grass for energy, Christmas trees, Blueberries, Eggs
  - OSB greenhouse
  - Cloverleaf greenhouse
- Importing farmers who have experience farming and marketing in the above list
- Added Value
  - Local market expands greatly in the summer (Tourists and summer residents)
  - Lack of community support (will they buy RR products)
  - Our quality of life and Healthy environment is a value that could be added to products
  - Community operated feedlot
  - Abattoir
- Rainy River Agriculture Website
- Change the public perception of farmer (not just about handouts from the government)
- There is a disconnect between the Farmer and the consumer.
- Decreasing activity and role of the OMAF Office
- Volunteer Burnout
- OMAF expertise
- Intern position for research
- Partnership with First Nations
- Conventional thinking, Affluence and Complacency will hamper efforts
- Area is diversified

- Policy and Political Issues:
  - Need Farmer Friendly Regulations
  - Need Consistent Enforcement of Regulations
  - Costs of regulations must be passed onto consumer
  - Need Interprovincial barriers for products removed. Products provincially inspected plants cannot move between provinces. Do not need federally inspected plant to do this just alignment of provinces
  - Municipal Drainage act
  - Education Politicians about agriculture issues
  - Ensure stable funding for our Emo Agriculture Research Station (EARS)
  - Poor Roads i.e. Hwy 600 Series
  - Land Ambulance
- No Government financial support for our inspection station. This is the only privately owned and operated inspection station
  - Transportation In and Out
  - Agriculture has been cut from Heritage Fund.

## **Initiatives or Pillars Agriculture Framework that resulted**

### **Important Considerations in developing opportunities and Initiatives**

When developing initiatives the following were listed as important considerations when developing initiatives and opportunities

- We need Success Stories
- Don't overlook the small things.
- Get a return for our efforts. WE want dollars at the end of the line for farmers
- Many of the weaknesses are Country wide problems
- Consider research and building enthusiasm to develop an opportunity
- Economic opportunities
- Communication and Policy

### **Pillars of the Agriculture framework**

Strengths weakness, Needs and Opportunities were reviewed and similar themes emerged and three main categories evolved.

- Added Value
- Alternative crops
- Communication Plan

These categories are the pillars of the Agriculture framework for the Rainy River District.

### **Alternative Crops/Products**

The opportunity to introduce and support alternative crops and/or products in the region was discussed.

## Generally what do we need to do to have alternative crops grown in the RR district?

1. People and Groups with the expertise
  2. Information packages.
1. People and Groups with the expertise
    - Soil and Crop Improvement Association
    - SCIA intern that was about to be hired
    - Producers who are already growing some on a smaller scale.
    - Guest Speakers who were familiar with some of the alternative crops and different marketing avenues. All Ag groups should be encouraged to bring in guest speakers whenever possible.
    - Clover Valley Farmers' Market –
      - Can help identify local opportunities
      - Can help identify local producers with experience

### Actions:

- Attend conferences and visit places to gain first hand knowledge i.e. North American Direct Farm Marketing conference
- Various producer and marketing venues.
- Prepare information packages
  - Packages should include information regarding
    - Market structure
    - Distribution
    - Research for the various alternative crops
    - The various target market and their standards.
    - Economics both globally and locally for specific opportunities such as market garden on the excess heat of the Cloverleaf/Fairway store location and the mill in Fort Frances.
    - Production information

### **Added Value**

## Generally what do we need to do to see value added to RR products and who will do this?

### Need to:

1. Vertically integrate the meat business
2. Identify new products
3. Go see people and businesses that are adding value.
4. Quality assurance program

### Who needs to be encouraging and doing this?

- Cattlemen's has the expertise in Beef and Soil and Crop in Crops and CVFM in adding value and marketing.
- Other avenues
  - RRFA, Cattleman's, Ag Days –Soil and Crop, CVFM, RRFDC, OMAF

### Actions:

- RR Website
- Branding
- Speakers brought in
- Farm gate brand

- Education and extension – Trips and Extension
- FedNor Booth at Royal Winter Fair Showing the RR district
- Look at the Ontario Marketing Inc.

**Abattoir:** The need for an abattoir in the Rainy River District was a major topic of discussion at the workshop. A group of three local investors were currently proposing to build an Abattoir in the district. A representative of the group gave a brief presentation of what they were proposing and where they were in the process. Mr. Richards told those in attendance they would be in a better position to give details on their plans in about one month. While most supported an abattoir, many questions, concerns, and opinions on the proposed Abattoir were raised and debated during the day. For the most part they centred on the following:

- The relative value of a provincially versus a federally licensed facility
- The obstacles to a federally licensed facility – both the increased cost, approval time, and an apparent bureaucratic/structural hurdle
- The need for commitment from cattle farmers
- The use of “hook” fees
- Interest, lack of interest, and in some cases ability, of local farms to grow their cattle on to slaughter weight
- Ultimate market and products

In order to help move this project forward the following were proposed:

- RRFA should look into the apparent hurdles with receiving federal approval
- As farmers still have many questions and concerns a meeting needs to be held specifically to address them – RRDA and RRFA should offer to work with the proponents on this

**Feedlot:** The possible need, or value, of a feedlot operation in relation to the abattoir was raised. Questions remain over:

- The level of interest and capacity of local farms to grow cattle to slaughter weight on their own properties
- The suitability of the district to host a feedlot operation (suitable soil, land, feed...)

The following were proposed as next steps:

- Discuss the issue with the abattoir proponents
- Ask the Soil Crop Association and the Research Station for their opinion on suitability of the land in the district
- Gauge interest from cattle farms in using a feedlot
- Identify someone with feedlot operation experience/expertise to further explore the idea

### **Communication Plan**

The value and need of communicating and educating about agriculture was discussed in all sessions. Three areas to concentrate on were:

1. Reconnect with the consumer
2. Better communication with in the ag community to share ideas and opportunities
3. Educate and inform Municipal, Provincial and Federal government regarding agriculture issues in an effort to create farmer friendly policy and programs.

## 1. Reconnect with the consumer

- The need to talk to the consumer about how their food is grown
- The need to continue and strengthen classroom education of youth so that they:
  - Understand agriculture
  - Understand the value of agriculture
  - Understand the needs of agriculture and perhaps consider a future in agriculture
- The need to promote the economic value of agriculture to the Rainy River district – Economic Impact Study/Statement

### Actions:

- Commodity groups should be encouraged to engage in this.
- A Rainy River Website could be created to assist with this
- Newspapers could be utilized more effectively by taking some prepared media releases and giving them a local slant.
- Existing Ag road signs could be reinvented to support/assist with this.
- OAFE should continue their efforts

## 2. Better communication with in the ag community to share ideas and opportunities

The role and value that local organizations and individuals play in sharing information was discussed. All Agriculture committees, Associations and groups have a vital role in actively facilitating discussion and the exchange of information important to the agricultural sector in the district.

This was discussed in relation to the following:

- Access to and use of existing feasibility studies and programs
- The promotion of best practices and new opportunities
- Bus tours and speakers targeted at learning and exposure

It was proposed that local organizations should each investigate how they can better support information exchange with their members as well as the broader agriculture community.

### Actions:

- Website to help assist with the various ag groups sharing info by posting their minutes and other information
- Advertise in the Northwest Link the web address.

## 3. Educate and inform Municipal, Provincial and Federal government

regarding agriculture issues in an effort to create farmer friendly policy and programs.

### Action:

- RRFA should take a lead role in this.

## Future Directions

The RRFA believes that initiating this process has been very worthwhile. Without any direct encouragement from the RRFA a number of very positive actions have taken place over the spring and summer. (These are the ones we are know about)

- The RR Cattlemen's Association are looking at the feasibility of a feedlot,
- Bernie Zimmerman from the milk committee did a milking demonstration (with real live cows) at the Clover Valley Farmers Market
- Clover Valley Farmers Market is considering the feasibility of cooperative distribution of local products and are looking for individuals that are interested in adding value to their products
- Soil and Crop Improvement Association has been successful in bringing on their Intern and has the capability to do some of the research indicated.
- RRFDC will post Agriculture Minutes and information on their website to facilitate info sharing
- In September the RRFA will have hard copies of the Economic framework available to the anyone interested.
- RRFA will review the Framework paper and determine it's own course of action from it.

## Agriculture Industry in Rainy River - Changes

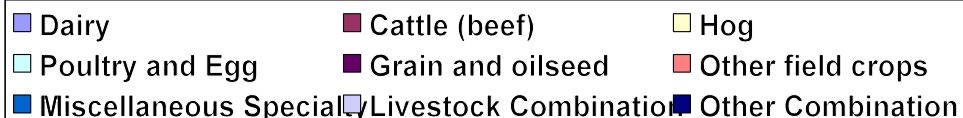
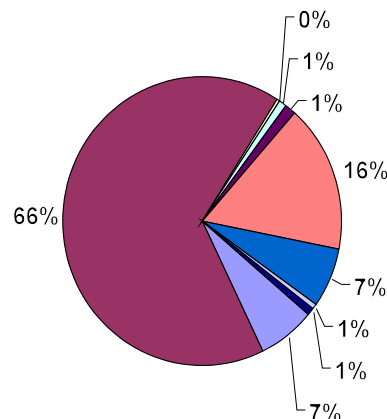
	1986	2001	Change
Number of farms	380	320	- 15.8 %
Dairy farm cash receipts	\$6 million	\$2.2 million	- 63.3 %
Beef cattle numbers	Stayed static		
Cash crops	Declined		
Total farm cash receipts	\$15 million	\$12 million	- 20.0 %

## Other Facts

- Only 73 of the current 320 farms in the district had Gross Farm Revenues over \$50,000
- District land values range from \$300 - \$400 per acre vs. \$9,000 per acre in S. Ontario

## Rainy River Farms by Major Product Type

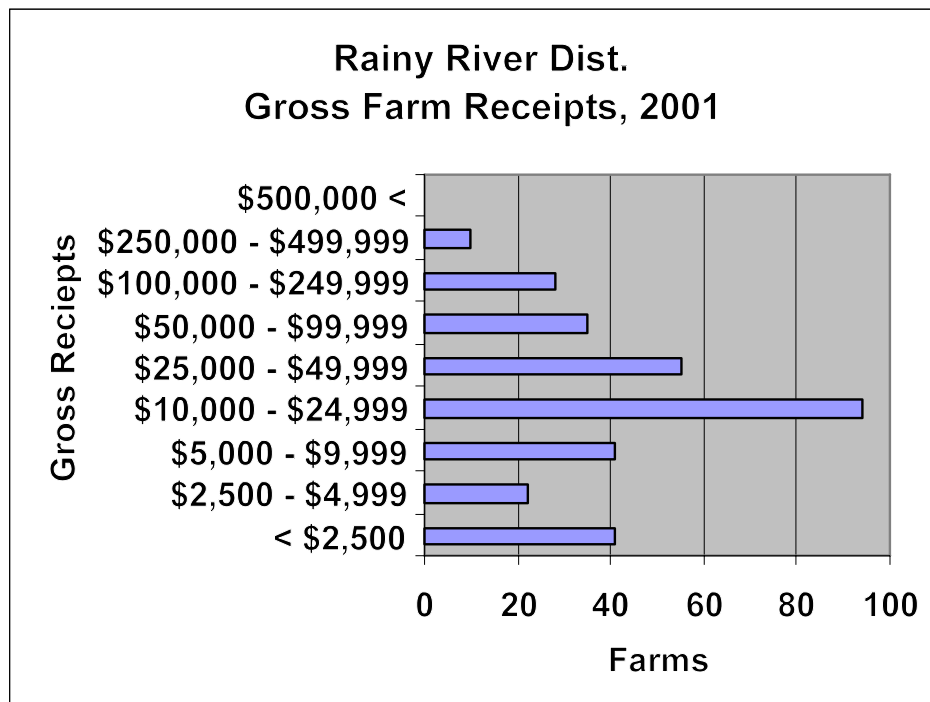
Farms (with sales >\$2,500) by Major Product Type, 2001



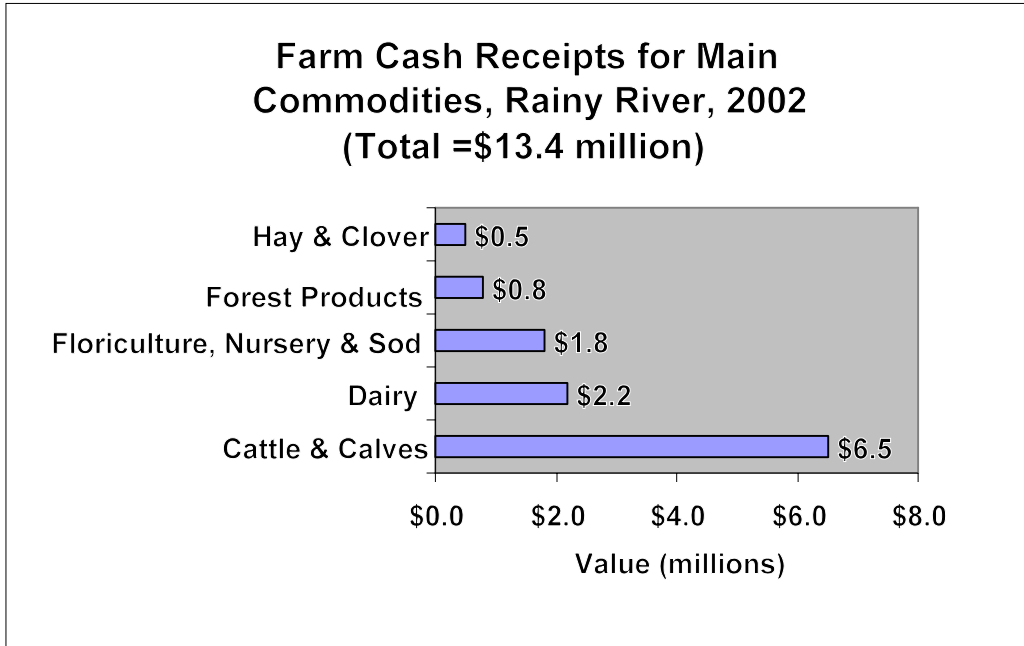
## Changes to Costs and Prices '97 – '03

Input Costs		Farm Prices	
Total Inputs	+ 12.3%	Farm Products	- 2.5%
Building & Fencing	+ 6.0%	Grains	- 4.5%
Tractors	+ 25.0%	Oilseeds	- 5.8%
Combines	+ 23.0%	Fruit	- 7.2%
Petroleum Products	+ 47.8%	Cattle	- 3.4 %
Insurance	+ 42.2%	Hogs	- 29.1%
Fertilizer	+ 17.6%	Poultry	-3.8%
Hired Labour	+ 11.6%		

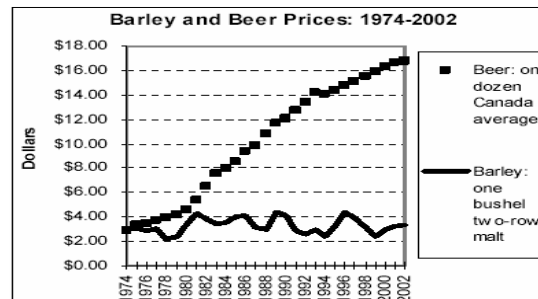
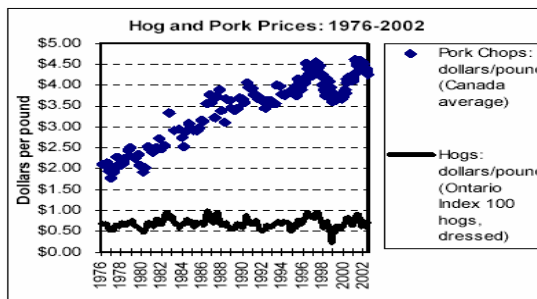
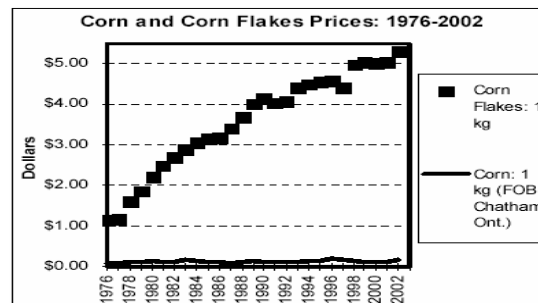
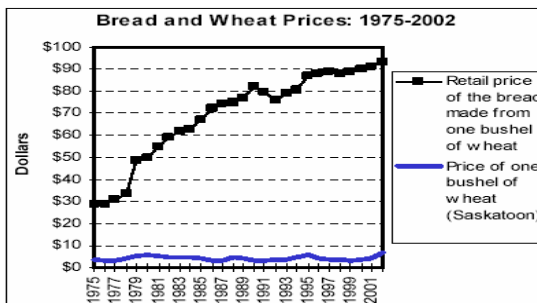
## Distribution of Gross Farm Rev. in Rainy River



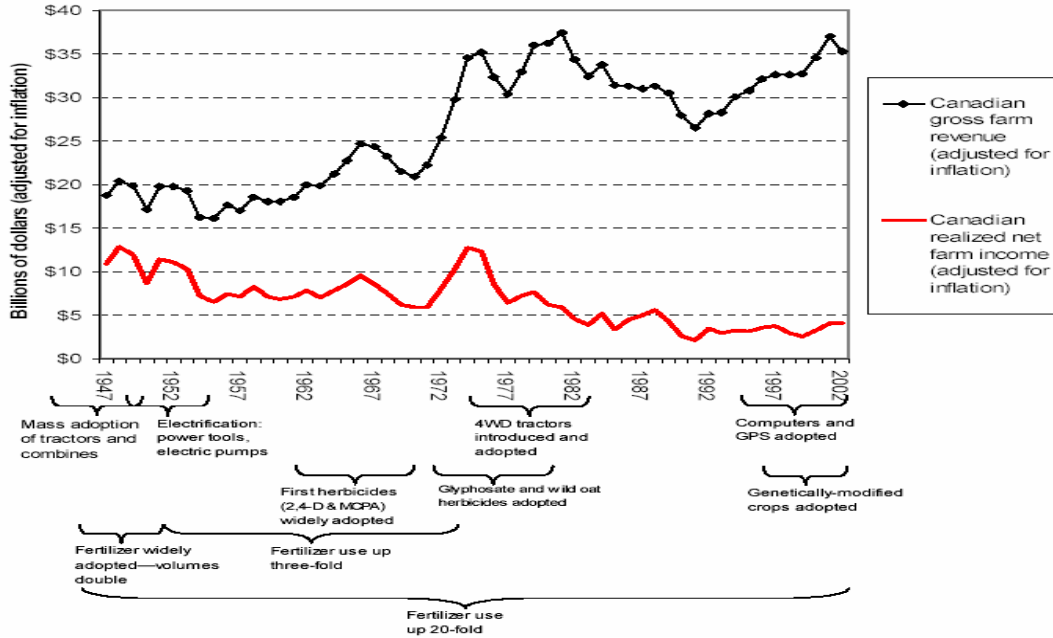
# Cash Receipts by Main Commodities



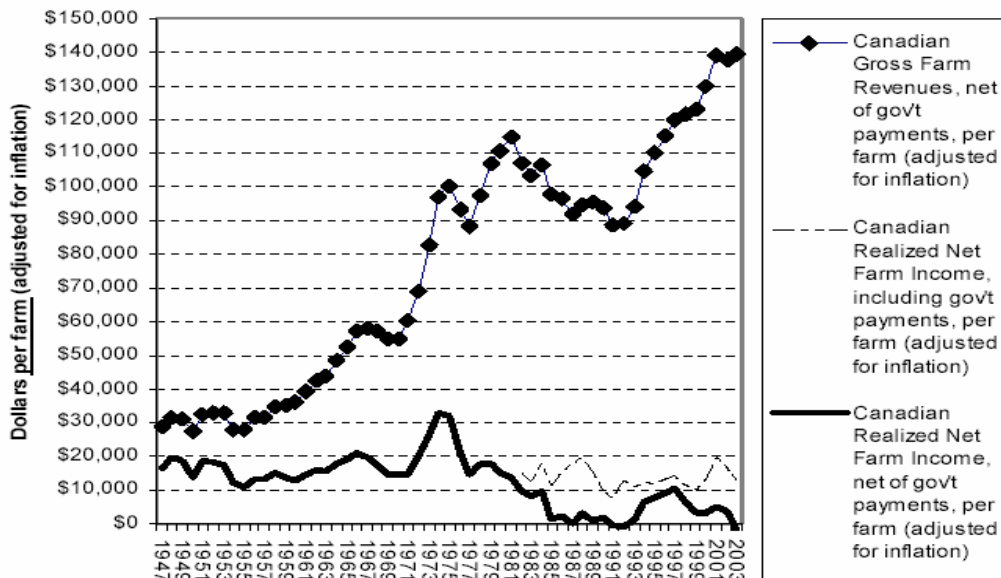
# Comparing Farm Gate and Retail Prices (not adjusted for inflation)



# Farm Gross Revenue, Net Income, and Technology



# Canadian Per Farm Gross Revenues & Net Incomes



The Rainy River Record, March 22, 2005

### **RRFA to deal with farm**

By Ken Johnston

When a crisis occurs people can do one of two things. They can either do nothing and walk away or take the bull by the horns and seek a solution.

Trish Neilson, President of the Rainy River Federation of Agriculture (RRFA), said the RRFA has decided to do the latter in regards to the series of hardships causing the district agriculture community to be in a crisis situation.

While the US border being closed to Canadian live cattle for the past two years is a major problem for cattle producers, Neilson said there are many other problems facing farmers today that are equally important.

Costs of farming like energy, insurance, equipment and supplies have all gone up an average of 23% while farm prices for cattle, hogs, poultry, oilseeds, grains and other farm products have actually declined by an average of 8%. At the same time the retail prices have gone up significantly with little or none of that increase going back to farmers. With that in mind, a recent presentation by district farmer Kim Cornell noted that the number of farms in the district has declined from 380 in 1986 to 320 in 2001. Total farm cash receipts in the region have dropped from \$15 million in 1986 to \$12 million in 2003.

Neilson said the RRFA has called together anyone from the various ag sectors in the district to meet on March 30 at the Barwick Hall. RRFA has hired a facilitator to help them go over the strengths and weaknesses of the district's ag. industry. From that she hopes they will develop a plan for the next several years. "We will have a lot to do in one day, but if we do nothing we will be going backwards fast."

The day is open to all and Neilson is hoping that by coming together that they can find solutions for problems facing the industry. "Developing a local plan for a sustainable agricultural industry is a major undertaking that requires serious cooperative efforts between all agricultural stakeholders. It will require innovative thinking from the farm communities and innovative policy from our politicians," said Neilson.

RRFA is asking anyone interested in attending to RSVP by Thursday as they need to know how many people to expect. To do so call Trish Neilson at 487-2519, Linda Armstrong 852-3645, Rick Boersema 483-5393 or Angela Halverson 274-9002. Anyone wishing to submit their thoughts or ideas on the issues facing the industry can also do so by calling Neilson.

The Rainy River Record, April 5, 2005

### **Farmers plan for the future**

By Michael Hilborn

A combination declining population, declining, and restricted markets have threatened the viability of agriculture in the district and the only ones who can fix it are farmers.

And the only way they can do that is to hang together.

That was the gist of message and conclusions reached at a special agriculture future workshop held at the Barwick Community Hall last Wednesday.

The workshop was put on by the Rainy River Federation of Agriculture with a view to identifying the factors likely to have the greatest impact on the future of agriculture in the district and to develop a strategy to deal with them.

The tone of the workshop was set by keynote speaker Jim Cumming, and reinforced by workshop facilitator Ed Hoshizaki of Edward Hoshizaki Development Consulting in Thunder Bay. Both men advised the audience their fate lies exclusively in their own hands and unless they came up with a unified plan, they would find the ears of government firmly closed to them.

"If you don't put a well-reasoned case before the government, you can be sure they won't listen to you," Hoshizaki warned.

With that seed firmly planted, people came forward with ideas and suggestions as planned. A number of people grumbled about the amount of red tape and regulation facing their industry, but Deb Cornell of the Rainy River Elk Company had a different view.

"I agree we're dealing with a lot of regulation, but we're no different from farmers in Woodstock or California," she reasoned. Instead of griping about things that are common throughout the industry, Cornell suggested people should focus instead on the things that set the district apart from other areas.

"We should promote our advantages," she remarked. "Let people know about our pristine environment and colourful history," she said.

Colin Neilson of Barwick shared that opinion and even took it a little farther.

"I think there is a real opportunity to market Rainy River brand products," he insisted.

RRFA president Trish Neilson pointed out these things did not come to be by accident and that too should be emphasized.

“My estimation of the strength of the district is in the people who live in it,” she pointed out.

However, Amos Brielmann of Barwick pointed out not all areas look neat and pristine. There are some sections along the highway that look somewhat unkempt and might reflect badly on the district if they are not tended to.

Predictably, talk soon shifted to the ongoing debate over an abattoir for the district. This idea has been around for nearly two years and has broken down into two camps. There is little doubt all are in favour of having such a facility in the district. The problems lies in what type it should be. While one group is prepared to put up a provincial facility and has already garnered some of the funding needed, another group is adamant the facility should be built to the more stringent (and expensive) federal standards so that the meat processed there can be marketed outside the province.

Russell Richards is one of the key players in the former camp. He told the group he and small group of friends are preparing a game plan to present to the government with a view to receiving additional funding. He also recommended the plant be manufactured to federal standards, but operated as a provincial facility.

“We can always upgrade it later if necessary, but the important thing is to get it going,” Richards argued.

Others were not convinced.

Kim Cornell raises beef cattle on his farm near Devlin and he was firmly opposed to Richards’s proposal.

“It frustrates me to no end that we’ve already lost one abattoir because it was provincial and now you're suggesting we tie our hands with a provincial plant again,” Cornell stressed.

“There is a market of half a million people in Winnipeg and millions in Chicago that will remain out of reach,” he added.

“And to open any doors on any chain stores, you have to have it federally inspected,” he concluded.

Although the abattoir issue remained unresolved, other ideas fell on more fertile ground. Ted Zimmerman raised the idea of creating a communal feedlot within the district to operate in conjunction with the abattoir. Traditionally, local farmers would keep their animals up to a certain age before sending them off to be finished elsewhere. That, said Zimmerman, is a lost opportunity.

“When I sell my cattle to a feedlot operator, I make a little money,” he explained. “When he sells them at market, he makes a little.

“If we can hang onto them (cattle), then the money stays here,” he reasoned.

Zimmerman suggested forming a committee of half a dozen beef producers to look into the matter further.

The summit wrapped up mid-afternoon on Wednesday, but according RRFA vice-president Rick Boersma, things are only beginning.

"It got a lot of people thinking said," said Boersma on Friday. "We're not done with this.

"I think we got people thinking a little outside their borders," he remarked. "The main thing is, we want all the farming groups to work together and speak with a unified voice," he stressed.

Hoshizaki felt the exercise was well worth the effort. "We're pretty happy with how it went," he concluded in a telephone conversation from Thunder Bay on Friday.

Although the abattoir issue remains unresolved, Hoshizaki felt a great of progress was made in other areas, such as the idea of brand-name marketing and Zimmerman's feedlot. He also felt some of the issue would be bettered handled at the provincial organizational level, once plan was agreed upon.

"There was a lot of discussion of larger issues, such as BSE, but it was decided those were best handled through larger organizations, such as the OFA," he suggested.

Trish Neilson agreed the meeting was successful, although exhausting.

"The abattoir became a big issue, of course," said Neilson from her farm on Monday. "But I think we got the issues on the table," she added.

She pointed out the basis for a plan of value-added marketing emerged from the conference and she intends to move forward with some of the ideas.

"We will work with the Clover Valley Farmers' Market and the Rainy River Future Development Corporation to market brand-name produce," she explained. "This was just a starting point. I think it was a really big step towards developing a plan.

"The task ahead of us now is to make something happen," she concluded.

## **The Fort Frances Times**

### **The Rainy River Federation of Agriculture**

*March 30, 2005*

The Rainy River Federation of Agriculture, led by president Trish Neilson, deserves top marks for staging an “ag summit” today in Barwick, bringing together a broad cross-section of the district farming community to tackle the myriad of serious issues facing that industry.

Certainly no one expects to solve all the problems with a single one-day session, but at least the RRFA is trying to do something positive rather than simply sit back and bemoan its plight while waiting for someone else to bail them out.

Equally encouraging is the fact today’s session is the first concrete development to emerge from the “community summit” held here in January, where 90 delegates representing various sectors and municipalities met to outline the problems facing our district—and what steps must be taken to solve them.

Back then, the delegates called for the creation of working groups to examine six key areas: tourism, agriculture, education, value-added wood products, import substitution, and immigration.

Also at the time, they all agreed the ultimate success of the “summit” hinged on how well the initial enthusiasm and suggestions were followed up with action.

Except for the RRFA, that follow-up has been slow to date. Just getting more people to volunteer to sit on these various working groups has been a tough sell.

Talking is better than not talking, of course, but there also comes a time when action is needed to back up those brave words. Other groups need to follow the RRFA’s lead and step up to the plate.

Jumping on the bandwagon is fruitless if the wheels already have fallen off.

**Address by Jim Cumming**

Market research conducted by Roberta Bencini and Professor Michael Burton (University of Western Australia) has demonstrated that 85 per cent of consumers would buy gourmet cheese made from sheep milk and pay high prices for them. Sheep milking began in Australia in the early 1960s to supplement the income from wool and lamb meat sales.

Good morning. It is a pleasure to be here today. I would like to congratulate Trish Neilson on hosting this brain-storming and planning session. This initiative following the Community summit helps move the district along. Michael Atkins, in his key note address at the summit made the point that communities of interest can no longer depend on senior levels of government to look after them.

That is true for small communities. It is true of universities. It is true of agriculture. Governments no longer have the time nor inclination to work with rural areas. Today the provincial and federal governments of Canada are focused on the city-states of our nation and their needs. Their focus is on urban transportation, health, childcare, education, infrastructure, security and trying to balance budgets. They are not interested in rural Canadian issues.

The federal government did a study on Urban issues in 2002. They have not done a rural issues study and the federal cabinet is not concerned with rural Canada. The votes are in the cities.

Rural Canada is on its own. Small communities are on their own. And small means less than 15,000 citizens.

What we grow, manufacture, harvest, the services we can deliver must compete on the global scale. Our market is not the Rainy River District. Our competitors are not just found in the district. They are found throughout the world.

Trish Neilson in her news release titled "so what's up in Agriculture, laid out a bleak snapshot of agriculture. Input costs are up. Farm gate prices are down. And the prices farmers are receiving are not keeping in line with retail pricing increases.

So what is the answer?

The answer is that if we want to continue our lifestyle, and our rural culture, then it is our job to renew our community. If a business or farming community relegates itself to whining about poor leadership, taxes and complaining, you can be assured that five years now, we can meet again, there will be fewer in the room and the discussion will be about higher taxes, poor leadership and lack of help.

Today, you have to be a leader. As I said you cannot depend on someone else to help you. If you do not take the initiative to change and create opportunities, someone else will take the initiative and change and will produce the products and services you might and it will be at your expense.

This week the province and federal governments announced assistance to certain agriculture sectors. Will it help in the long term? Or will the monies be stop-gap measures? Can you continue to wait for government to help?

In 1986 a report title Final Report and Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Resource Dependent communities in Northern Ontario was released. The committee was chaired by Bob Rosehart, president of Lakehead University, and the members sitting on the committee were primarily elected provincial MLA's. There was also representation from Chambers of Commerce. They toured the north and heard from municipal councils. They sent 80 recommendations to the government of Ontario. The majority dealt the mining and forestry industry. Not a single agriculture issue was brought forward.

A few called for the decentralizing of Ministry offices and dispersing them across the north as an economic tool. The offices were decentralized, then centralized, then downsized.

Most recommendations left the job to developing the north to provincial and federal governments. It transferred the job from local people to someone else.

One recommendation called for the establishment of a medical school in the North, a reality happening this year. One called for an investment system for people to invest in local business and industry in the north. It is a reality today called Grow Bonds, that come available on April 4.

Another recommendation called for the creation of a community leadership program to develop leaders across the north. It included the following components, leadership and community decision making methods, networking techniques, the political process, community volunteerism, communications, community education, thorough

knowledge of local economy and resources, economic development strategies, tourism development and marketing, regional relationships, municipal financing and infrastructure, social planning for the community.”

Someone realized that the leadership and development of the north had to take place in the hands of the people who lived here.

Thirty years ago, computers were huge and slow. Some large businesses had just begun to use them to improve efficiencies. Then the chip manufacturers expanded and the microchip has transformed our way of life. Everything we do today is much different than thirty years ago. Today’s car has more computing power than did the computers that put the men on the moon.

In the newspaper business in the late 1960’s there were two powerful giant manufacturers of type setting equipment Linotype and intertype. They had huge clunking machines that were all mechanical in nature. Along came an upstart called compugraphic that took the chip and using filmstrips could output type to paper and a speed of 10 times faster than the old mechanical machines. They took over the market. The other two companies did not adapt. They disappeared by 1972. The story does not end. Compugraphic captured 80% of the market by the end of that decade and yet it disappeared by 1995 because it failed to realize the potential of the PC.

The power of the microchip has transformed our lives.

In fact today that technology impacts on everything we do, from the alarm that wakes us up in the morning, the phone we use, to the telephone that connects us, to the toaster. Dan Pierroz will be holding a clinic to imbed chips into pets so that they can be identified. And I suspect that many cattle ,dairy and hog producers are already embedding chips into their animals.

I listened intently to the presentation at the community summit in Fort Frances by Kim Cornell. His positive outlook on the future of agriculture in the Rainy River district enlightened a great many of the 90 participants. Agriculture often is not seen as being vital to the economy of the Rainy River District.

The numbers tell a different story, In 1986 farms contributed \$15 million to the economy, In 2001 they contributed \$12 million. The notable point is that in 1986 dairy farms had gate receipts of \$6 million while in 2001 those receipts had declined to \$2.2 million.

The largest change in farm receipts came from the loss of dairy farmers in the district. The milk quotas were being bought up and transferred to other parts of Ontario. Beef farming held its own.

The number of district farms declined from 380 to 320 in the same period of time. Only 73 have farm earnings over \$50,000.

We talk of paradigm shifts. Lets look at how the rug has been pulled out from under cattle producers. That was an instant shift. Your biggest market was taken away and your competitors in the United States have no intention of letting you back in. It is a similar story with soft wood lumber although the retailers were unable to find a substitute for Canadian wood.

In Australia in the early 1990's, a movement began that created farm gate brands for beef and sheep products. And when bans took place on red meat, those farm gate brands continued to do well because, through record keeping and monitoring everything that was fed to the cattle, and the land, those farm gate brands were able to continue to deliver their unique products.

I googled Paradyme Shift Theory and one of the first topics on the top ten list was "adding value to goats, the need for a paradyme shift." I had misspelled paradyme with a y instead of igm. It is a study of adding value to goat farming in South Africa. More value for meat, for milk, for cheese, for leather, for breeding stock.

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The agriculture community faces daunting tasks in the district. The community summit report outlined key areas to approach in agriculture. They include Developing an immigration program to attract farmers and processors to the district. Hands on approach to an abattoir, pull together studies that have been conducted on agriculture, land use into a central accessible database, identify areas of outsourcing, and retaining farms in the district and assist in succession.

An old concept is often referred to as the Bohemian culture. It refers to studies that have been done looking at communities that have significant numbers of people doing creative things. Richard Florida in his book "The Rise of the Creative Class" looks at the importance of developing a creative class in the community.

It stretches beyond artists, and musicians and includes engineers, craftsmen, architects, and scientists. Farmers. In his forward to his book Florida writes. "We live a time of great promise. We have evolved economic and social systems that tap human creativity and make use of it as never before. This in turn creates unparalleled opportunity to raise our living standards, build a more humane and sustainable economy and make our lives more complete. "Human creativity is the ultimate economic resource. The ability to come up with new ideas and better ways of doing things is ultimately what raises productivity and thus living standards.

The Internet and our connectedness afford us the opportunity to become more creative. The schools and colleges can foster the creative spirit in all of us. We have to create a culture of being open minded and diverse in our thinking.

Today your mission will be to begin the process of wresting control back into the agriculture community of the Rainy River District. Relying on senior levels of government is futile. The key thing for you to understand today is that the solution lies in your hands in this district, in the knowledge, intelligence and creative capabilities of each and every one of you here this day. I am confident that by your agreeing to participate here today, you are well on your way to controlling your destiny.