

Memoirs

of

a Prairie Farm Boy:

Sixty Years of Public Service

1962-2022

Gerry Gartner

Memoirs of a Prairie Farm Boy: Sixty Years of Public Service, 1962-2022

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Dedication

To my parents who made a life-long commitment to the education of their children so that they could experience a better life. Theirs was the lost generation.

To my family for their support and understanding in my many absences while pursuing my public service mission. My deepest regret is not spending more quality time with you.

To the many great management teams without whom we would not have been able to accomplish our missions.

To Loretta Tuchscherer for her encouragement, editing and advice.

To former colleagues Paul MacNeil, Ralph Smith and Peter Black for their editorial advice and grammar corrections.

Foreword

Now that I am in my “retirement years”, I thought it timely to reflect on, and document my 60 years of professional public service.

It is an arduous task to recall clearly and express my thoughts on various chapters of my public service. I am going to give it a try.

To do justice to the chronology of activities throughout my career, it was important to initially set out in some detail my early formative years which shaped my future commitment to public service in its many forms.

As the sequence of activities and assignments unfolded over time, work experiences proved to be a mixture of successes and failures. They all had lessons to be learned. The key acid test was “are the results sustainable”?

Therefore, most sections will include a note on “lessons learned” as implied advice to the upcoming public servants whose mission it is to improve the social and economic well-being of various public groups and individuals.

Chapter 1: The Formative Years

Nature's Wrath

My parents emerged from the Saskatchewan drought and depression of the '30's filled with hope and optimism as weather conditions improved and wheat markets surged in the midst of World War II.

Farming on the prairies is very much weather dependent, and determines the fortunes of farm families – good and bad.

At a very young age, I vividly remember the tragic event which unwittingly pre-determined my future mission in life.

I clearly recall the beautiful summer day on our farm with a bumper wheat crop waving in the prairie breeze, only to be dashed into the ground by the afternoon hailstorm.

I remember the tears and agony on the faces of my parents as hopes for a rewarding future were lost by five minutes of nature's wrath. That image was burned deeply into my mind. I recall it vividly to this day. I wondered even then why that has to be?

Why can't farmers eke out a living while performing the most vital life purpose of food production without any protection from the weather?

You are your brother's keeper

My parents were deeply religious and instilled the Christian tenets into the minds of their children. The belief that you are responsible for your fellow man was etched in my mind as you matured and applied it to your life-long work.

The pioneer prairie environment reinforced this tenet since farm families greatly depended on the cooperation and a "helping hand" for all activities and situations, such as "harvest bees" for sick farmers in distress.

Agrarian reform

On top of the challenge of farming in a hostile weather environment, prairie farmers struggled to achieve fair treatment in the process of the transporting and marketing their grain.

Since the early days of settlement, prairie farmers fought to establish countervailing market power to combat the monopolistic grain trade and the captive railway systems.

As a youth, I heard many stories (and the experiences of my own family) relating to the shortage of grain box cars and the price gouging of grain merchants. In response, grain producers united to create countervailing institutions in the form of cooperatives (e.g., Wheat Pools) and Marketing Boards to add balance in market power, and fairness in the sale of their products.

The groundswell of agrarian reform movements also put pressure on provincial and federal governments to address the many injustices prevalent in the farm community through the formation of institutions, such as the Canadian Wheat Board, the Canadian Grain Commission and national supply management agencies.

I was fortunate, in my capacity as a senior public servant, to be in a position to play my part in fostering the development of institutions that served to address the dominant grievances that prevailed during the agrarian reform movement.

Chapter 2: Off to the University of Saskatchewan – 1958

After completing High School, I enrolled in the College of Agriculture, University of Saskatchewan at Saskatoon. I financed my first year by selling my small herd of Hereford cattle – a tough decision in itself. Tuitions at the time enabled me to cover all first-year costs, much to the relief of my parents who could ill afford the expenditure. In the following years, I was able to earn enough from summer jobs to complete my Bachelor of Science in Agriculture.

During the last years of enrollment, I specialized in Agricultural Economics because that subject area would best prepare me for whatever path I took in my future career. I am not sure how I managed the good grades I mustered because sports occupied much of my time. Little did I know at the time that playing football and baseball would ingrain in me the basics of effective team management and project implementation.

During my time with students and professors I had the good fortune to take marketing classes from Dr. Phil Thair. He had obtained his Ph.D. at the University of North Dakota. His thesis was the development of a program structure for crop insurance. He was anxious to see his concept put into practice, since he too grew up on a prairie farm that suffered the wrath of the western climate. In a few years we would re-connect to operationalize a crop insurance model.

Chapter 3: Conservation & Development Branch, Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture-1962

Irrigation Development

Immediately following graduation, I was successful in obtaining the position of Resource Economist with the Conservation and Development Branch with Dick Lane as my supervisor.

My employment commenced in the midst of the Medicare Crisis and turmoil involving the doctor strikes.

Our first work assignment was to undertake a Benefit-Cost Analysis to determine the feasibility of launching the irrigation component of the South Saskatchewan River Development Project – touted as the creation of an oasis on the dry prairie landscape.

Construction of the dam to form Diefenbaker Lake was well underway, but uncertainty remained about the nature and extent of irrigation possibilities by the Province's Douglas/Lloyd government of the day. Early soil surveys boasted the prospect of over 500,000 acres of irrigable land. However, future, more detailed analysis reduced that number down to 50,000 acres due to salinity and topography limitations.

Benefit – Cost Analysis is a useful economic tool to evaluate the long-term feasibility of development projects by discounting all costs and returns incurred over the project life back to present values.

After an exhaustive undertaking, we concluded that the irrigation component of the complex was not economically feasible, with a benefit-cost ratio of 0.22:1.0.

Accordingly, the government of the day shelved the irrigation component of the project but continued with hydroelectric and tourism/recreation development.

Federal Veterans Land Act

Immediately following WWII, the federal and provincial governments embarked on a program to assist those veterans who wished to re-establish themselves in agriculture production. On the prairies, the program made marginal lands, and those abandoned during the 1930 drought and depression available to prospective farmers.

After farmers had almost 20 years of experience farming on these lands, Dick Lane and I were tasked with the assignment of evaluating the success or failure of this major program initiative.

An extensive survey was undertaken to assess the extent to which economic and social progress was made by the participating veterans.

We concluded that the program, with all its good intentions, was doomed to failure from the outset. Starting with limited capital, veterans faced the huge challenge of eking out a living on non-arable land with short growing seasons, and a sparse infrastructure (e.g., roads, utilities). Most lands were abandoned and reverted to their natural state. Most veterans migrated to urban centers in search of a more viable livelihood.

Good intentions, but a poorly conceived public program.

Chapter 4: The Thatcher Years-1964-66

Irrigation Revisited

Upon the completion of these work assignments, I returned to Saskatoon to pursue my Master's Degree in Agricultural Economics with my professional appetite whetted by my first-hand experiences of the past few years. I left the college before completing the final draft of my thesis – big mistake!

I returned to the Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture, Policy Branch under the directorship of Jake Brown – a thoughtful, capable policy analyst and strategic thinker.

The Province's Thatcher Government was essentially a “one man show” with all decisions (big or small) taken by the Premier – a total contrast to the Douglas/Lloyd administrations where decision-making was delegated, and policy formulated by Cabinet with the assistance of highly qualified public servants.

I was soon to experience this new administrative style first hand. A movement was afoot within the government ranks to revisit the feasibility of the irrigation component of the South Saskatchewan River Development Project.

My colleague, Sandy Hutcheon and I were tasked with the challenge of updating the original Benefit-Cost Analysis, including secondary benefits to make sure we covered all possible attributes of the irrigation project.

We were summoned to the Premier's office, with only five minutes to present our findings. We concluded our presentation with the same results as before, but with slightly higher Benefit-Cost ratio. The Premier's reaction was to proceed with the job, regardless of the economic consequences and the questionable use of public funds to construct the project infrastructure – pumping stations, main canals, etc.

Lesson learned: politics trumps economics every time

Crop Insurance – Early Beginnings

Following the Irrigation debacle, work was quietly underway to formulate the implementation of a crop insurance program – much to my delight.

Glen Flaten, a chicken farmer south of Regina, was working part time for the Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture Policy Branch. He was compiling the basic elements of the program such as historical variety yields sourced from farm production records across the province in order to formulate the appropriate premiums for various crops.

The program was officially launched in 1965 with less than 100 enrolled farmers.

Records of each farmer were kept on a rolodex by one clerk. Thanks to Jake Brown's vision, creativity and salesmanship the program continued to evolve and grow with more farmers signing up after a period of "wait and see" to assess performance.

I was fortunate to work alongside Glen in the formulation and implementation of the first crop Insurance program, followed shortly thereafter by Manitoba, and eventually all provincial agriculture departments.

After several years of operation on their own, federal-provincial negotiations resulted on the creation of a national Crop insurance Program with the Federal Government a full participant in the management and financing of its administrative costs so producer premiums only reflected production risk for their areas.

A side benefit of working with Glen Flaten were his efforts to create the Saskatchewan Chicken Marketing Board as a means to improve producer selling power in a marketplace dominated by concentrated processors and retailers. Out of those early beginnings was spawned the concept of Supply Management. While new to the agriculture industry, supply management was a production/marketing approach common to all non-agriculture sectors whereby you manage your production levels in accordance with expected market demand.

When later coupled with central desk selling, a strong element of market power was achieved by the industry. This early exciting experience with chicken marketing remained with me as a marketing approach that I studied, promoted at every opportunity and managed in later years.

During my last year of employment with the Thatcher government, I was seconded to the Saskatchewan Water Services Commission with the responsibility of undertaking an economic analysis to determine the feasibility of the proposed SSEWS Project (Saskatchewan Southeast Water Supply). My supervisor for the project was Grant Mitchell – a hold-over from the Thatcher purge of senior civil servants, many of whom were quickly employed by the federal government to occupy key positions in Finance and Treasury Board.

The project envisioned pumping water from the Diefenbaker Dam through a canal and pipeline to service needs of potash mines and communities southeast of Saskatoon. The benefit-cost analysis proved to be much more favourable than the irrigation project because of the substantial revenues which would be generated from the water consumption of the mines and rural centres. The project was constructed and to this day is proving its worth.

Chapter 5

On To Wisconsin – 1968-1970

I grew increasingly disenchanted with the work environment under the centralist government of the day. Public Servants (and Ministers) were hamstrung by central control that stifled initiative and creativity.

During my studies for my master's degree, I was tutored by Professor Hadley Van Vliet. He had taken his PH.D at the University of Wisconsin. He stressed the virtues of the Institution School at Wisconsin which concentrated on developing market structures to improve the economic performance of farmers in the marketplace.

I applied to the Department of Agricultural Economics (which housed the Institution School) and was fortunate to be accepted. With the winning of a Canada Council Bursary, off to Wisconsin we went – family and all.

One of the selling points of the University of Wisconsin was its superior living accommodations for married students with families. This proved to be a great asset for the family who were under enough stress moving to a new environment and the pressures of studies.

An exciting (but unfortunate) experience was the Vietnam demonstrations on Campus. I rode my bike to class regularly. One day I noticed the Gym parking lot was full of armoured vehicles. It turned out that major demonstrations were to occur in the afternoon. During my economics class in one of the nearby buildings, we were the recipients of tear gas coming through the vents. Needless to say class was dismissed.

My fellow Canucks shared the same study area with American graduate students, many of them returning war veterans who were resuming their graduate studies. They were a disenchanted and bitter lot. We foreign students were careful not to discuss the Vietnam War with them.

My three years of study and research at Wisconsin were ones of mixed satisfaction. Much to my disappointment, the Institutional School ceased to exist as an entity on its own and was folded into a cooperative extension agency attached to the Department of Agricultural Economics.

My first two years consisted of struggling through endless classes in micro and macroeconomic theory lectures from promoters of monetary policy. By passing my prelims, I was awarded a Master's Degree in Economics.

In my final year, the most relevant and practical research that I was to pursue took a turn for the better. Dr. Cook, one of the remaining Institutionalists became my thesis supervisor. He had received a grant from the Kennedy administration to analyze the merits of developing and implementing a national fluid milk marketing program.

The motivation for this undertaking was the fact that under separate state marketing plans, surplus producing States (such as Wisconsin) were restricted in the movement and marketing of fluid milk into deficit states and regions. As a consequence, surplus producing states were confined to the production and processing of lower value products such as cheese.

Improved handling standards and now feasible long-distance transportation created an economic environment for changes to occur.

My thesis results and government report clearly pointed to the huge benefits to all parties (producers, processors and consumers alike) if surplus fluid milk was free to move to deficit market areas.

Unfortunately, the implementation of a National Fluid Milk Marketing Plan was shelved during the Nixon administration. However, it was comforting to learn that the Plan was implemented by the subsequent administration and is generating the expected economic benefits for all concerned.

Chapter 6

Back to Work – 1970

After receiving my PH.D it was time to consider my future employment options.

Dr. Phil Thair offered me an Assistant Professor position in the Agricultural Economics Department at Saskatoon, while Dick Lane (now a manager in the newly former Federal Department of Regional Economic Expansion - DREE) offered me an Economist position in Ottawa. A tough choice had to be made.

I considered again my personal mission and my own nature as a builder, rather than a teacher. I elected to move to Ottawa and participate in an exciting time in federal government administration. Trudeaumania had swept the Liberals into power with the expectation of a dynamic period of economic development and social reform.

DREE was a newly formed Department with the responsibility of partnering with provincial governments to invest in priority infrastructure needs in the respective provinces. As the program gained momentum, huge federal and provincial expenditures were made (with a strong bias toward Quebec).

A major part of my job responsibilities was to undertake an economic analysis of project proposals and recommend on the merits of each. Again, Benefit-Cost Analysis proved to be a useful approach in undertaking the analytical work assignments.

The huge wave of expenditures by the government throughout all departments paved the way over the coming years for a major financial crisis that had to be addressed. I will have more to say on this issue in future chapters.

The work with DREE was satisfying from the standpoint of utilizing my economic analysis capacity. However, it did not totally fulfill my desire to be more directly involved in developing and implementing public services in various forms.

Chapter 7

The Blakeney Years – 1972-82

The opportunity to more fully serve my mission came with the election of the Blakeney's NDP Government in Saskatchewan in 1971. It came to power with the promise of implementing an exciting range of social and economic development initiatives. Once elected, the government then faced the huge challenge of implementing that portfolio with a depleted civil service and limited finances.

Premier Blakeney was a unique combination of a political pragmatist and strong public administrator. He believed in the basic need for a strong public service in order to expedite the many platform commitments of his newly elected government. But where to start?

Blakeney called upon Grant Mitchell as his Interim Chief Planning Officer to start the rebuilding the government decision making structures and the public service. Grant Mitchell was a senior civil servant during the Douglas/Lloyd government era who shared Blakeney's vision regarding the design of administrative structures, and the personnel required to carry out the government's mandate.

Chief Planning Officer – Executive Council

In 1973, I joined the calling by Grant Mitchell to return to Saskatchewan and take up the position initially of Director of Policy /Planning, Executive Council – the Cabinet's central staffing office- uprooting my family once again and dragging them back to Regina.

An early rebuilding activity was to collaborate with Grant Mitchell to establish the Department of Environment, including the absorption of the Water Services Commission. Grant left his interim position with Executive Council to become its first Deputy Minister.

Policy development capacity of the newly created Energy Secretariat was greatly strengthened by the recruitment of Peter Black. The Secretariat was headed by Roy Lloyd, who was moved from his position as Director of the Budget Bureau.

I was then promoted to the Chief Planning Office position and Senior Deputy Minister reporting directly to the Premier. I continued on with the rebuilding process, and to serve as the central policy and planning advisor to the Cabinet – a huge set of responsibilities! Where to start? Unfortunately that was not for me to decide. Events of the day played a role in setting my priorities.

Federal-Provincial Energy Conference

A major distraction from my original internal mandate was the urgent need to defend our oil resource revenues from federal actions.

In 1973, OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) took it upon itself to curb world oil production, thus triggering a major supply shortage and subsequent price increases. As major domestic oil producers, Saskatchewan and Alberta had the potential to reap windfall revenues as crude oil prices rose sharply in keeping with world prices.

Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's Government in Ottawa took the position that all Canadians should share in these windfall revenues, much to the consternation of western provinces. At issue also was a legal question, since natural resources fall under the jurisdiction of the provinces. The debate raged, and ultimately a Federal-Provincial First Ministers Conference was called in an effort to bring the dispute to a head through a negotiated settlement.

After much discussion and negotiation, the oil producing provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan failed to achieve a major concession from the federal government. As a result, a major share of the oil revenues that normally would have gone to the two provinces ended up in Federal Government coffers. A portion of those funds was used to establish PetroCanada – first as a Crown Corporation, then as a privatized oil company.

This signaled the start of western alienation and hostility toward an arrogant Trudeau Government.

Western Economic Opportunities Conference (WEOC) - 1974

World oil provinces eventually subsided and returned to more reasonable levels. But the hurt and hostility toward Ottawa remained, continually fueled by the Prime Minister's snubbing of western concerns – “sell your own wheat “!

The Western Premiers were united in their concerns with federal indifference to western issues and called upon the federal government to meet and discuss both outstanding issues, as well as where economic opportunities can be realized through joint cooperation between the governments.

Reluctantly, the Prime Minister agreed to attend a two-day, Western Economic Opportunities Conference (WEOC) in Calgary. But the Prime Minister refused to relent on his position respecting western concerns and grievances. In his closing remarks, he ended by saying: “this ends the one and only WEOC”.

Those same issues such as equalization payments and resource development policies remain with us to this day.

By this time, as Chief Planning Officer, I had established an Inter-Governmental Affairs Branch within the Executive Council's Policy and Planning Office. I hired Paul MacNeil on secondment from the federal government as Director of a first-rate staff (including Ralph Smith and David Hawkes) to advise and support ministers dealing with intergovernmental issues and activities. They “cut their teeth” preparing the government representatives for the Conference by conducting research, undertake briefings and speech writing. The Branch continued to play an invaluable proactive role over the coming years as issues beyond provincial boundaries appeared to accelerate.

Civil Service Development and Innovation

A daunting task before me was to rebuild a decimated civil service that was a product of the Thatcher Liberal government's administrative style. Program creativity was not encouraged – in fact, was frowned upon. Those that remained were careful not to “rock the boat”.

To achieve a vibrant, proactive and committed civil service required all the human resource competence at my disposal.

The first undertaking was to start at the top – staffing the Civil Service Commission and hiring competent Deputy Ministers in key portfolios who possessed leadership skills that would motivate their departments to deliver on the mandate of the new government. The challenge was to tactfully restore confidence in the bureaucracy through hiring senior leadership that was able to clearly articulate the vision of certain government initiatives, and the role of staff in accomplishing program missions. Strategic planning was the order of the day through an approach that called for management/staff engagement in formulating and implementing action plans.

Along with this recruiting effort, was a plan to introduce innovative approaches to the employee workplace. The traditional 9 to 5 work schedule was not conducive to the needs of many public service staff, the majority of whom were women with family responsibilities.

To address this workplace shortcoming, I collaborated with Dwayne Adams, Assistant Deputy of Health to introduce a *Flexible Working Hours* pilot project and test it in the Department of Health’s Policy Branch. The innovation proved highly successful in terms of meeting the needs of staff. It also had the related effect of increased morale and productivity throughout the Branch. After a few modifications the concept was adopted government-wide—a model that was emulated by other governments in short order.

Flexible working hours has now become the “norm” in most government and business settings, thanks to a small creative experiment in the Policy Branch.

Resource Development Policy

The new NDP government was deeply concerned that the existing royalty policy put in place by the previous government did not provide for the province obtaining a fair and equitable share of the revenue generated by resource extraction enterprises, particularly oil and gas, and potash.

A group of senior managers was tasked with the job of formulating and implementing a new royalty policy. The new policy consisted of implementing a royalty based on a percentage of revenues generated from any resource

development/extraction. The new regime would replace the existing “fixed value” basis of the previous royalty policy.

As expected, the new royalty policy was met with strong resistance among resource enterprises. Negotiations were ultimately successful with oil and gas producers in determining the appropriate percentage of the levy. However, potash producers challenged the merits and legality of the new policy and pursued every means at their disposal to negotiate a settlement (more to be said on this issue in a future section).

Western Premiers' Conferences

The intense alienation of the western provinces served to solidify cooperative working relation among the provinces. It served as a forum to advocate (as a Bloc) their positions on a number of federal-provincial issues, and to develop institutions of common benefit to the west. A prime example of the cooperative working relationships was the creation of *Western Veterinary College* and *Veterinary Infectious Diseases Laboratory* located at Saskatoon. The “trade-off” was the creation of the *Health Sciences Centre* located in Winnipeg.

These initiatives filled a much-needed demand for agricultural and health services in the region. Over time, they became vital institutions in the diagnosis and control of major health crises such a mad cow disease, and now Covid 19.

Western Premiers Conferences continue to function to this day as a vital network for cooperation on both regional and national issues.

Saskatchewan Bureau of Statistics

At the beginning of the Blakeney administration, the province was poorly equipped to statistically measure its economic performance, and the impact of any public policy on its economy. In response to that major deficiency, I set out to establish the Saskatchewan Bureau of Statistics as a Branch of the Planning Office.

The Bureau was staffed by a seasoned economist with support from knowledgeable statisticians and part-time coop students from the University of Regina.

The Bureau's first priority was to increase the reliability and depth of its monthly business survey of provincial economic activity. This measure greatly improved the credibility of provincial Gross Provincial Product (GPP) forecasting ability—crucial information required by the Department of Finance when estimating the future revenue component of the Annual Budget.

A second, and related activity of the Bureau, was to develop and utilize an Input-Output model as an econometric tool to measure the economic impact of any policy/program initiative of the government, including taxation measures.

Government Decision-making Structure and Process

The Blakeney government was faced with the task of planning and implementing a wide range of election commitments. In keeping with the Premier's administrative discipline, an efficient and effective planning/implementation process was developed to ensure thorough analysis and development of policies and programs that were ultimately presented to Cabinet for final decision making. Blakeney's "rule of thumb" and direction to senior management was: "spend 5% of your time identifying your goal or objective; and 95% of your time on how to get there".

The main entity created to facilitate the smooth and effective flow of the planning/implementation process was the *Cabinet Planning Committee*. The Committee was Chaired by the Premier with ministerial representation from major departments. I served as Secretary to the Committee, responsible for bringing forward major policy and program proposals developed by appropriate teams of deputies and senior managers.

After full deliberation, the recommended action was written as a cabinet submission – no longer than two pages, with the following sections:

- Subject and Recommendation,
- Policy alternatives,
- Recommended option with justification,
- Policy or program implementation process,
- Financial Implications,

- **Political Implications.**

Once a Cabinet decision was made, any financial implication was presented to Treasury Board (another major Standing Committee) for funding consideration and approval.

If the Cabinet decision required legislation approval, the decision was submitted to the Legislative Committee for development of the Bill and any required Regulations, once it becomes law.

As Chief Planning Officer, I would monitor the implementation process by the affected Department(s) or other government agency. Programs such as the Provincial Drug Plan were vetted through this process.

A relatively small contribution was my participation in an ad hoc committee charged with developing a new *Provincial Logo*. Several design options were developed and tested on a focus group. The final selection was to reflect a more current mosaic of the province. After a short public consultation, the selected option was presented to Cabinet for final approval. Adoption of the new logo called for changes to signage, letterheads and other representations of the province.

Deputy Minister - Saskatchewan Industry and Commerce -1975

By the mid 1970's, political storm clouds were on the horizon – the private business sectors felt alienated and the potash sector refused to accept the terms of the new royalty regime, thinking public opinion would be on their side and the government would back off.

Blakeney fully anticipated the political turmoil that would engulf the province when the government made any aggressive moves and proactive decisions in the resource area. His strategy was to build a roster of senior managers, who in his words “can wheel things”. Those “wheelers” were to be placed in strategic positions to address major areas of concern and/or potential conflict. They were: Gary Beattie, Roy Lloyd, David Dombowsky, Murray Wallace and yours truly.

As the animosity continued to build, the Department of Industry and Commerce was in a state of disarray. The Deputy had been dismissed and the Department lacked direction and purpose – just at a time when there was a dire need to build strong relations with the business community. I was placed in the Deputy Minister’s position on an urgent, but interim basis to rebuild its purpose and direction, and to undertake proactive measures to re-establish positive relations with the private sector—all while maintaining my responsibilities as Chief Planning Officer, Executive Council.

My strategy was three-fold:

First, train and provide direction to the department’s extension services located throughout the regions to aggressively promote and coach small business entrepreneurs to improve their business management skills;

Second, as Director on the *Saskatchewan Economic Development Corporation (SEDCO)* Board, take a proactive approach to providing high risk, long-term financing for the fledgling farm implement manufacturing, tourism, and service sectors; and

Third, establish the *Saskatchewan Trading Corporation* (serving as first Chairman) to facilitate the export of Sask. agricultural and non-agricultural products by providing financial services and professional advice to potential exporters.

This strategy went a considerable distance in placating private sector concerns about the government’s commitment to the business community.

A crowning achievement while serving on the SEDCO Board was to facilitate the invention, manufacturing and marketing of *Hydraulic Rock Pickers*. A high percentage of the province’s arable land is comprised of Glacial Till soil—land that glaciers scoured, but left rocks spewed across the landscape. It is productive land, but farmers faced the annual, back-breaking task of hand-picking rocks before seeding because rocks took their toll on farm machinery (I remember it well). A few embryonic machinery manufacturers had the creativity to mechanize rock picking with a tractor-driven hydraulic machine that would comb up the rocks. Degelman Industries and several others received long-term loans to

commercialize their inventions and never looked back. Their rock pickers, a boon to Saskatchewan farmers, were and continue to be, sold across Canada and abroad.

Necessity is the mother of Invention!

On a more personal note, the Department's office was on the top floor of the Saskatchewan Power¹ Building with an observation deck above. During a meeting one day in my office, we were distracted by seeing a body plunge down the side of the building. Needless to say, the observation deck was then closed to the public!

China-Japan Mission

In the spring of 1975, I participated in Premier Blakeney's mission to Japan, then China. Two circumstances justified the trip.

First, under its new political regime, China began opening up to western interests, with invitations extended first to the Ontario Premier, then to the Saskatchewan Premier.

Secondly, Blakeney's government finally made the bold move to create the Saskatchewan Potash Corporation and take over a major portion of its production through negotiated purchase of several operating mines. Thus, the government needed to placate export markets, to convince Japan that it was "business as usual", and to promote the use of potash in China. My role was to add an agricultural production dimension to the delegation.

Imbedded in our delegation was a rookie CBC² reporter by the name of Peter Mansbridge, who later became the CBC's news anchor. He reported back home every day on mission activities.

In Japan, I was confronted by canola buyers who claimed they found glass in one of the Canadian shipments – a cute negotiating tactic which I countered by asking for samples so we can verify their claim – they never responded!

¹ Saskatchewan Power, a crown corporation of the Government of Saskatchewan, is responsible for providing electricity to the province.

² The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation is the Canadian public broadcaster for both radio and television. It is a federal Crown corporation that receives funding from the Government of Canada.

The highlight of the Japanese part of the trip was the opportunity for Premier Blakeney to address the all-powerful Kanandren (consisting of Japan's main business leaders), to explain the reasons for the potash takeover, and to quell any concerns regarding continuity of supply to the Japanese market.

In China, Premier Blakeney met with China's Foreign Minister and stressed the importance of building greater trade arrangements with the country. While on tour we visited several Cadres, or farm communes, where production was undertaken on a rudimentary basis. The main "fertilizer" in use near urban centres was "night soil". In discussions with agricultural authorities we made the suggestion to try potash as a fertilizer additive to bolster crop yields. They agreed to let us set up fertilizer trials to gauge the impact on production. Following up, Doug Korvan, a new employee of the Potash Corporation undertook the trials. The mission was a total success, evidenced by the subsequent large and sustained exports of potash to China.

Election Time

Shortly after the Japan/China trip, the Blakeney government called a provincial election for June 11, 1975. The NDP government was returned with a majority, but with fewer seats. One casualty was my own Industry and Commerce Minister, Kim Thorson. The Minister represented a very "swing" constituency and was concerned that the potash would reduce his chances of re-election. It proved to be the case.

Jack Messer, a farmer/businessman from the Tisdale riding was appointed the new Minister.

Saskatchewan Transportation Agency – "Save the Crow" – 1976-78

Rail Line Abandonment

Another political crisis was coming to a head in the form of the national railways' attempts to force the elimination of their obligations under the historical Crow Rate Agreement. This Agreement was structured between the national railways and the federal government during the building of the transcontinental lines. In return for the federal government granting the railways millions of acres

along the rights-of-way, the railways were obligated to ship western grain to port at a rate of ½ cent per ton/mile “into perpetuity”.

With costs rising, the railways began holding the agriculture industry to ransom by refusing to replace aging railcars, pressing for the abandonment of a vast number of branch lines, and “modernizing” the system with unit trains collecting grain from fewer, high-throughput elevators and inland terminals—all at the expense of prairie farmers who would be required to haul their grain greater distances and pay higher freight rates.

In anticipation of the emerging battle with the railways, Premier Blakeney expedited a number of strategic actions. First, on the way back from our China trip, I was taken aside and informed that I was to establish a central transportation policy agency comprised of all transportation staff to mobilize a major thrust to counter the railways’ attack on the Crow Rate.

Secondly, he appointed Gordon MacMurchy as the minister to head the charge on behalf the government and farmers, with the support of the new Sask. Transportation Agency. MacMurchy was a tough-minded senior minister (and an ex-professional Maple Leaf Hockey Team defenseman!) with overall rural political responsibilities who served as Minister of Continuing Education prior to assuming his new transportation responsibilities. He was a creative thinker and a determined believer that education and educators should come to the people and communities, rather than vice versa. Accordingly, he established the Community College system, with facilities established across the regions for training in technical, trade and other career opportunities – a model for other provinces that followed shortly thereafter.

To mount a campaign of the magnitude required to challenge the railways’ emerging actions, I seconded transportation engineers, economists and communication specialists from across the government’s departments to form a central policy making and implementing unit. Great support in the anticipated campaign was the able assistance provided by Marj Benson, Executive Assistant to Gordon MacMurchy.

In response to the growing railway pressure, the Government of Canada made the Canadian Transportation Agency responsible for a Royal Commission on Rail Line Abandonment, with former Supreme Court Chief Justice Emmett Hall as the Chairman. The Royal Commission was charged with the responsibility of conducting hearings and receiving briefs and presentations by all parties associated with the issue.

In anticipation of the upcoming hearings, we launched a cross-province set of meetings in all regions to rally support for retaining branch lines and maintaining the Crow Rate. Meetings were held with the other prairie Ministers and grain companies in an effort to gain their support and make presentations to Hall. MacMurchy was disappointed in the mild support provided by the Sask Wheat Pool who secretly had their own agenda, which was to ride benignly on the coat tails of the railways and undertake elevator consolidation to accommodate the expected branch line abandonment activity – so much for their grass roots loyalty.

Hearings were held in Saskatoon for several days. The Agency prepared its case for presentation by Gordon MacMurchy. In addition, we prepared questions for use in cross examining the railways when they made their presentations. A revelation which emerged from the financial information provided by the railways was the fact that any income derived from grain hauling was diverted into their general revenues – not earmarked to maintain the system and replace rolling stock!

After the hearings were adjourned, we anxiously awaited the conclusions and recommendations of Hall's report to the federal government.

When the report was released, I was ordered to summarize the main findings and recommendations, and report to Cabinet the next day. I had to pull an "all-nighter" to read through the 400-page report, and to provide its findings to Cabinet the next morning

Justice Hall's report took a middle ground with respect to the nature and extent of branch line abandonment. He placed the lines into three categories: those that should be immediately abandoned; those which are economically viable and those which are marginal and require further review and analysis.

The report was silent on the matter of the Crow Rate issue, only to scold the railways for the misappropriation of revenues.

To draw final conclusions on the status of the questionable lines, the National Transportation Agency initiated country hearings to review in detail their long-term status. The Transportation Agency economists and engineers set to work and undertook detailed analysis of each abandonment candidate. I presented and argued our case at each hearing, proving the revenues generated from grain haulage on various lines exceeded their transportations costs. In the end, we were able to salvage at least a dozen branch lines that were previously slated for abandonment.

The status of the Crow Rate remained uncertain for the time being. It was not until the upcoming round of World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations was its fate sealed. The Crow Rate was considered a “subsidy” under the terms of the Organization (ignoring the historical significance of the Crow Rate Agreement). Under pressure for negotiating WTO members, the federal government acquiesced and agreed to eliminate the Rate. Consequently, the railways moved to increase the haulage rates 3-4-fold, but did not increase the supply of rolling stock for their grain hauling fleet – farmers lose again!

Another fatality in the WTO negotiations was the loss of the Canadian Wheat Board – the highly successful central selling agency for wheat oats and barley. The Wheat board was reluctantly established by the federal government in response to the agrarian protests against the exploitation of the Winnipeg Grain Exchange. Again, the federal government surrendered the Board during negotiations, despite the false accusations by competing countries that envied the Board’s aggressive marketing strategy.

Seatbelt Legislation

Despite its flat terrain and sparse population, Saskatchewan experienced a surprising number of traffic accidents, deaths and injuries. Many of these incidents were the result of not wearing seatbelts, when analyzed by our transportation safety engineer.

Eiling Kramer, the Minister of Highways took it upon himself to be the Champion in the government campaign to increase the usage of seatbelts. I partnered with Mr. Kramer and expedited the development of the legislative and communication strategy to enhance the seatbelt usage throughout the provincial population.

First, the Sask Transportation Agency had to compile the facts about usage vs non usage, and the physical dynamics of seatbelt use and life preservation in the case of accidents of various forms. We also compiled the data on hospitalization costs and ambulance expenditures in response to serious accidents. The Agency then worked with Legislative Council (the Legislature's staff) lawyers to prepare the draft Bill.

The next step was to gain the support of the police, medical profession and other health related professions to act as spoke- persons if called upon. A comprehensive communication strategy was also developed (including TV ads) and to be launched when the government initiative was made public.

When Minister Kramer tabled first reading of the Bill, public response was fully anticipated – an incursion into personal freedom (sound familiar?). Premier Blakeney's response to that distorted definition of "freedom" was:

"There are limits to freedom – your freedom to act only goes as far as my nose. In other words, when your actions impact on me in a negative way, that is where your freedom ends".

The legislation provided a framework for the implementation of seatbelts, initially on a voluntary basis. However, it became clear that the usage was not increasing as was expected. With the proactive support and urgings from the police and medical professions, the government moved through regulation to make seatbelt usage mandatory, with fines for noncompliance.

Not long after, most provinces (except Alberta) introduced their own seat belt laws.

Saskatchewan Transportation Company (STC)

The Sask Transportation Company was established as a Crown Corporation during the Premier Douglas Government era to provide bus service to rural communities at reasonable cost. The provincial bus company was in financial trouble when I joined the Board of Directors. The main cause of the Company's financial difficulty was lack of ridership resulting from rural depopulation and rural community decline. Better roads and vehicles presented a more attractive alternative to bus travel.

As part of my responsibilities with the Sask Transportation Agency, I served on the Board of the Sask Transportation Company. My hope was that by modernizing the fleet and station facilities, the Company might make a turnaround. In addition, I promoted the concept of a ***Rural Bus Service*** – using smaller vehicles to cater to the needs of rural people in smaller communities for accessing services in larger communities. Scheduling was such that passengers could connect with the main routes if they so desired. At the time of my departure and return to the Agriculture Department, a pilot project was developed and implemented.

Return to Sask Department of Agriculture -1978 - 1982

After a 14-year absence, I found my way back to where I started my government service – the Sask Department of Agriculture.

After the Hall Commission report and the ensuing branch line hearings, a period of political disquiet descended upon the farm community and governments. Given their new-found freedom, the railways proceeded to gouge farmers with freight rates four times the Crow rate. In addition, the elevator companies began the process of “streamlining” their respective country elevator systems, replacing the old “prairie sentinels” with high throughput elevators to accommodate unit trains.

Even with their increased revenues from grain haulage, the railways still did not add to, and replace the rolling stock in their fleets to accommodate the growing supply of grain destined for export position. To Premier Blakeney and Gordon MacMurphy this issue represented a gnawing concern that they chose to address in dramatic fashion.

The Transportation Agency had served its purpose and was disbanded, with the return of staff to their respective departments. Gordon MacMurchy was named Minister of Agriculture, and I became the Deputy Minister.

My first action as the new Deputy Minister was to build a strong **Management Team**, knowing that with Gordon MacMurchy as Minister, we were in for a very dynamic and creative period of program development and implementation. That team consisted of:

- Marj Benson as Associate Deputy minister;
- Stu Kramer as Assistant Deputy Minister-Finance and Administration
- Erna Stinnen as Human Resources Director; and
- George Pearson as Policy Director.

I also assured myself that all branches were headed by competent and committed Directors, capable of effective program delivery. I was also fortunate to inherit a strong network of regional extension staff consisting of farm management and production specialist – much needed to mobilize program delivery at the local farm level.

Farmstart Loan Program

A major deficiency existed in the array of available lending for beginning farmers, particularly those wishing to establish livestock enterprises. The major farm lender at the time was the federal Farm Credit Corporation (FCC). Unfortunately, the Corporation only took land as security.

The challenge then was to develop a creative lending program to fill the void, and address the unique needs of beginning farmers. After considerable internal deliberation and public consultation, the provincial Farmstart Corporation was initiated and staffed by competent farm financial and loan specialists.

Farmstart, working in partnership with FCC, took livestock, inventory and improvements as security for loans to young and beginning farmers managing diversified operations. The most creative feature of these loans was ***deferred interest and principal payments*** for up to three years, because most livestock enterprise investments do not generate immediate income. That repayment

flexibility soon became the norm for other lending institutions in the coming years, including FCC.

Although Farmstart took a high-risk position with young farmers, its loan default percentage was low – a surprise to many sceptics.

Sask College of Agriculture – Program Partnerships

A most satisfying and productive experience was developing and implementing agricultural production programs for the benefit of farmers across the province. That warm and productive relationship was reinforced by the personal relations with my old Sask Department of Agriculture Director, Jake Brown – now the Dean of the Agriculture College. In addition, Dr. Leo Kristjanson was University President – one of my undergrad professors. These close personal ties were very conducive to mounting an exciting range of applied research programs.

Jake Brown and I would co-chair a yearly summit before budget finalizations to discuss and agree on the research program and funding requirements for the future activities. Professor George Lee of the Ag. Economics Department served as Research Coordinator for the College; and Stu Kramer was his counterpart for the Department.

Farmers were becoming more adept at applying new technology and scientific information to their operations. They were not satisfied with general recommendations coming from research centres. Saskatchewan soils and weather conditions greatly vary across the province. Farmers needed more detailed information that was relevant to their particular farmers and regions. In addition, many young farmers held advanced degrees in plant production and had much to offer in developing practices to improve growing conditions in their respective areas.

Gordon MacMurchy and I believed we needed to reorganize how applied research is conducted. We were certain that local farmers had much to offer in conducting applicable scientific investigations. So, rather have farmers learning from the scientists, we established a system where the scientist went to farms and worked on site with producers to address their particular needs. That innovative

approach became known as the ***Farm Lab Program***. It took the large-scale research programs (and Researchers) directly on-farm to test new technology, and to solve production problems of various regions and localities.

The Agriculture Department's regional extension staff collaborated with the researcher and local farmers to assist in identifying local research priorities, and in the logistics of expediting the on- farm research. Their additional responsibility was to communicate the research results to farmers in the region.

The program proved to be a resounding success for all concerned. It was an innovative research strategy that was then emulated by other research organizations throughout Canada. Research investigations were sensitized to local and regional needs. In addition, the approach improved the communication of results to those who could best utilize them on their farms.

Another major innovation was the creation of the ***Crop Development Centre***. For many years, farmers were concerned that the federal crop variety development program fell short of their particular needs in terms of adaptation to the prairie climate and the growing variety of crops emerging for commercial production (e.g., peas, beans, canola, mustard, etc.).

To address this shortfall in variety development, the Department "grubstaked" the establishment of the Crop Development Centre, comprised of plant breeders seconded from the College and other plant research institutions. This Centre of Excellence grew in notoriety by its performance in breeding and distributing new and improved crop varieties for the benefit of prairie famers. Its valuable contribution continues on to this day – bigger and better.

The other major development that I fostered was the ***Zero Till Revolution***.

Dr. Don Rennie, a soil scientist at the College was considered a rebel when he proclaimed that summer fallowing in crop rotations has a devastating effect on soil fertility through erosion and nutrient losses. It was not until my college classmate Jim Halford committed his farming career to demonstrating the benefits of continuous cropping. The major bottleneck to overcome was to develop a seed drill sufficiently strong and heavy to properly place seed into stubble (leftover postharvest straw). On his Indian Head farm he set to work and manufactured a

drill that was capable of doing the job. The drill was tested by the Department's Agricultural Machinery Institute. After minor adjustments, Jim proceeded with the manufacture of the drill at his small farm factory. He began demonstrating the virtues of zero till cropping to farmers across the prairies and USA under the corporate name of AGROPAK. Zero till cropping soon became the norm for crop production across the prairies and elsewhere. Good bye summer fallow!

Saskatchewan Grain Car Corporation

The shortage of grain hopper cars to move the growing prairie production to export position remained a burning issue in the minds of agricultural producers and their governments. Even with increased revenues the railways failed to invest in new rolling stock.

Action was needed to resolve the grain car shortage situation. Little did I know that Premier Blakeney and Gordon MacMurchy were determined to make a bold and creative move to resolve the grain car shortage. The Minister informed me of the decision one day by saying: "you are going to create the Saskatchewan Grain Car Corporation – go buy 200 hopper cars"

To expedite this challenge in short order, I enlisted the great help of Stu Kramer and Marj Benson – each with an assignment to complete the task. The Corporation fleet was to be used by the Canadian Wheat Board as part of its car allocation responsibilities, and only in the western region for hauling grain and oilseeds.

Maj Benson negotiated the agreement with the Canadian Wheat Board, and Stu Kramer negotiated the fleet maintenance agreement with Canadian National Railways.

My job was to buy the hopper cars. At a price of about \$150,000 per car, 100 were built at Thunder Bay, and another 100 were built at Hamilton. The entire undertaking was kept deliberately under wraps until the upcoming Federal-Provincial Agriculture meeting. At that meeting, Gordon MacMurchy announced the creation of the Sask Grain Car Corporation, and the purchase of 200 hopper cars to be added to the fleet of western grain rolling stock.

The response by other Ministers was both shock and dismay, with a touch of embarrassment that they had not done the same. MacMurchy then challenged them to follow his lead and make their contribution to resolve the grain car shortage. Shortly thereafter, both Alberta and Manitoba stepped up to the plate and rented used hopper cars from the USA. The federal government also eventually purchased hopper cars to bolster the inventory of rolling stock.

In retrospect, the bold and preemptive move by the Premier and Gordon MacMurchy resonated well in the rural hustings as well as being a shrewd political move and a lasting legacy

It gives me comfort to see the cars rolling down those tracks and heading to Vancouver port.

Chapter 8: Sherwood Credit Union – 1979-1982

As if I was not busy enough, I was elected to the Board of Directors of Sherwood Credit Union. At the time, inflation and rising interest rates were soaring to new heights. I felt the need to contribute to the salvation of the third largest credit union in Canada. Sherwood's challenge was to balance its portfolio at a time when past loans were made at low rates while now having to pay high returns on savings accounts to remain competitive. Fortunately, the Board weathered the storm by drawing heavily on its reserves.

As part of my ongoing Directorship responsibilities, I served on the Finance Committee and reviewed all agricultural loan submissions. Final decisions were made by the full Board of Directors after receiving recommendations from the Finance Committee.

On a more positive note, during my tenure was the pioneering of *ATMs* in Canada.

The Board was at first very skeptical about the concept when it was presented by the finance officials. However, we agreed to test the new technology at the main office on Albert Street in Regina. After working out minor glitches we expanded the ATM system to all branch offices. It was not long after that other financial institutions in Canada saw the potential and ATMs and soon followed suit.

Little do people know that the innovation was first pioneered in beautiful downtown Regina!

Chapter 9: 1982 Saskatchewan Provincial Election

After tabling its usual balanced budget, the Sask government called a spring election in the midst of an economic crisis driven by inflation and soaring interest rates that threw households into a panic. Interest rates reached as high as 20% and those heavily exposed were in danger of losing their homes and farms.

The budget was somewhat oblivious to the broader economic situation and provided few initiatives that were conducive to getting re-elected. In Gordon MacMurchy's words: "A great administrative budget, but no politics in it".

That proved to be the case. The NDP were caught flat-footed when the new Saskatchewan Party under the "leadership" of Grant Devine came out of the gate with a rich and simple debt recovery program that resonated with anxious loan debtors. The NDP responded with a complex debt recovery program of its own that was not user friendly and difficult to comprehend. It fell flat in the eyes of the electorate and failed to stop the momentum of the Saskatchewan Party.

Another circumstance that contributed to the NDP loss was the shift in political allegiance among farmers and rural communities. I sensed this shift during the course of the country meetings designed to rally opposition to those wanting to eliminate the Crow Rate. The Minister's strong and powerful message was just mildly received by the attending farmers—agrarian reform had lost its momentum. Political winds were shifting to the right, and played themselves out in the loss of several rural constituencies.

The Saskatchewan Party, under the leadership of Grant Devine, sensed this shift to the political "right," particularly in rural Saskatchewan as farms grew larger and consolidation was occurring. The Saskatchewan Party focused its rural campaign largely on the *Land Bank Program*. This program formed the centerpiece of the 1972 NDP agricultural election platform, and was immediately implemented upon the Blakeney Government coming to power.

The Land Bank Program was administered by a Commission and staffed by civil servants seconded mainly from the Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture.

The thrust of the program was to facilitate the intergenerational transfer of farms from older retiring farmers to new and younger starting farmers. The process consisted of the Commission buying farms of retiring producers and selling or renting it to new/young farmers to round out their farms into viable production units.

The Saskatchewan Party, with Grant Devine as its main spokesman, decried the Land Bank as a communist takeover of the province's farm land. The constant and repetitive misinformation spread by the Saskatchewan Party resonated with the rural population. As the saying goes: repeat misinformation long and often enough, people will start to believe it as fact.

The NDP government was soundly defeated, and the "real powers behind the throne" took control.

Election Aftermath

Only a few days after the election, the new Devine government began its "housecleaning" of public servants who were associated with the previous government, based on the assumption that we could not be supportive of the new government (the US model rather than the British system of maintaining permanent heads in the transition process).

The 17 Permanent Heads (Deputies) were immediately dismissed with a pittance of severance and replaced by party faithful. While the dismissal was devastating in itself, it was not as traumatic as the sudden alienation experienced from those previously close colleagues, including University partners. We were treated as lepers within our own communities and neighbourhood circles. We were shunned and ostracized for fear of them being seen with us by the new government.

The experience took its toll on me and my family. I felt bitter and resentful of the treatment that my own people would inflict upon us and other staff in the same situation. As a result, I lost compassion for the welfare of Saskatchewan people.

In hindsight, it was just as well that I was not able to continue working for the Devine government as they systematically destroyed all institutions and policies the previous government had implemented for the benefit of its people, including agricultural programs.

The final straw was the wholesale privatizing of most Crown Corporations and the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan. It was Blakeney's vision that the dividends derived from potash would be sufficient to finance all health and social services. That dream was lost with the stroke of a pen. The Devine government continued its sell-off until all crown assets were liquidated and funds squandered. In farmer jargon—not only did they sell off the farm, but the home quarter as well.

On a positive note—as one door closes, another opens.

I was successful in winning the competition for the Assistant Deputy Minister position in the Manitoba Department of Agriculture after suffering through a devastating summer in Regina. So, goodbye Saskatchewan and hello Manitoba!

Chapter 10: Deputy Minister—Manitoba Department of Agriculture – 1982 -1988

I always considered the position of Deputy Minister to be caught in the middle of no-mans-land with political bullets from both sides flying all around you. So, I was quite comfortable in my new position as Assistant Deputy Minister where I could concentrate on policy/program development and implementation. My first assignment was to develop a new leasing arrangement for the administration of the province’s 13 million acres of agricultural crown land.

I was also delighted to have Bill Uruski as our minister – a young, proactive farmer from the Interlake area³ of the province. We shared views and positions on a wide range of matters, including that of crop insurance and orderly marketing through supply management.

However, my “comfortable pew” was not to last. I was only in my position as Assistant Deputy Minister when the Deputy Minister, Rod Bailey was recruited by Agriculture & AgriFood Canada for an Assistant Deputy Minister position in Ottawa. It was only a few days after Rod’s departure that I was “asked” by Premier Pawley to assume the Deputy Minister position – how can you refuse a Premier?

Into the Breech – Farm Family Survival

I assumed the Deputy Minister’s responsibilities in the midst of the high interest rate period when it was wreaking havoc on farm families and anyone indebted with flexible terms. The destructive effect was amplified by the aggressive lending tactic of commercial banks, who recently had set up agricultural lending divisions staffed by professional agrologists.

³ The Interlake area is between Lakes Winnipeg and Lake Manitoba, north of the city. The main centre is Gimli, of Icelandic heritage.

It was time for aggressive action on our part to salvage as many young and other highly indebted farmers from bank foreclosure. The most severe cases were those who were taking over the farm from the older generation, and then could lose the entire farm.

Fortunately, I inherited a great management team in Craig Lee (Policy), Tom Pringle (Extension) Cliff Cranston (field operations) and Greg Lacomy (Finance and Administration). In addition, we were blessed to have well-staffed regional offices. Their farm management specialists and Home Economists would prove to be invaluable in working with farm family candidates to achieve satisfactory financial arrangements with the banks. I also trained other field production specialists to back up the home economists and farm management specialists to “think finance” when working with producers in financial difficulty.

In Winnipeg, I formed a coordinating body consisting of the Agricultural bank lenders, Farm Credit Corporation, and Manitoba Credit Corporation. I directed the members to cease the aggressive foreclosure action and rather develop compromising solution that kept the families on the farms.

Through a mediating approach to the farm debt issue involving flexibility on both sides, we were able to salvage the bulk of producers caught in the net of high interest rates at the time. In addition to the invaluable services of the Department’s Home Economists and farm management specialists, the Farm Credit Corporation played a key role in the financial arrangements made with many farms by taking possession of the land and improvements, then leasing them back to the farm family with the option to buy back in favourable terms.

An interesting observation made during this dynamic period was that the spouses of the farmers had a better understanding of the financial circumstances of their respective operations, and were more amenable to seek help to find solutions to their farm financial difficulties.

As an example of the gratitude for our efforts to salvage farm families, every Christmas a husband, wife and their three little kids made a special trip to my office with a gift to directly express their appreciation for saving their farm and putting them on solid financial footing.

Farm Debt Mediation Panel

As the period of high interest rates began to ebb, Minister Uruski and I realized that farm financial issues will always be with us albeit with less intensity. The mediation approach had worked in the past, so why not continue as a forum for addressing future financial cases?

Out of that discussion, we created the Manitoba Farm Debt Mediation Panel and chaired by Fred Tufford, a seasoned farmer from Portage la Prairie. It continued as meeting place where both farmers and lenders could bring the situations to the Panel for deliberation, and for jointly developing solutions to benefit of both parties.

I was pleased to see that the federal Department of Agriculture & AgriFood Canada saw fit to establish a National Financial Review Panel modelled on our experience. That national panel continues to function to this day, serving farmers and lenders from across Canada.

International Management Mentoring

The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) struck an agreement with the Manitoba government to train senior civil servants from St. Lucia. I had the pleasant and satisfying task to mentor Steve Fontenelle for several weeks during my tenure with the Department.

St. Lucia had just received its independence and was faced with the challenge of self-government, and the need for it to be managed by competent civil servants. Steve was chosen as one of several St. Lucians to come to Manitoba to undertake intensive training in all aspects of managing public administration.

Over several weeks, my management team and I provided Steve with a “crash course” in all functions involved in managing a department in the context of overall government operations.

Side by side, Steve was involved in writing Cabinet/Treasury Board submissions, budget planning, and financial/ human resource management. Steve also was exposed to the operation of extension personnel in various regional

offices. As a “take home” assignment, Steve was required to develop a program design and plan for execution upon his return to St. Lucia.

On a light note, we wanted to give Steve some relaxing time by taking him on a fishing weekend to Cliff Cranston’s cottage. One of Steve’s lasting impressions of Manitoba was the size of the mosquitos that plagued them while fishing!

The following year I was required to visit Steve in St. Lucia to review and report back on how he was progressing with the implementation of his assignment. While there, I also coached his colleagues on the development and management of banana and egg marketing boards, then in their infancy.

A legacy of the mentoring experience was the development of a lasting friendship with Steve, his family and St. Lucia.

Crop Insurance Enhancement

My concern was that this major income support program was not performing to my expectations, or that of the farm community.

Minister Uruski and I set out to rebuild this vital program, starting with a new General Manager in Ron Dalglish. Ron was a very competent senior civil servant in the Blakeney government.

Together, we held a series of country meetings and asked producers what improvements they would like to see in a revamped crop Insurance program. With those responses in mind, significant changes were made in program performance, including: expanded crop variety coverage; improved historical yield recording for more accurate premium setting; and more timely assessment of crop damage.

Time to leave – 1988

The Pawley NDP government called an election and was returned with a good majority. However, in the midst of a cabinet shuffle, Bill Uruski was moved from Agriculture to the Department of Municipal Affairs – much to my disappointment.

My new Minister took office with a pre-conceived view that the Department was not performing up to his expectations. The frustrating part in holding that view was that we never were clear on what the new directions were to be, and how to get there.

Coupled with the dysfunctional relations with the new Minister was the directive from Treasury Board to severely cut program and administrative expenditures—yet perform the same level of service delivery.

I took these two developments as omens that perhaps it was time to leave government service, especially after an exhausting, highly stressful period of farm family survival.

Looking inward, I thought of myself as a builder and therefore not of the character required for the austerity period then gripping governments.

Accordingly, I resigned my position as Deputy Minister, thus ending my career as a government public servant.

Chapter 11: General Manager—Canadian Egg Marketing Agency (CEMA) 1988-1994

While in government, I always had the greatest of respect for dairy and poultry producers for their proactive approach in organizing production and marketing of their products in an orderly manner, with supply managed in relation to consumer demand. This approach was unique in the agricultural sector since in most cases producers were at the mercy of concentrated buyers who possessed the marketing and pricing power. Needless to say, the formation of orderly marketing and supply management was very much frowned upon by processors and retailers since they lost their power over the farm production sector.

I also often wondered if I could make a contribution within the dairy and poultry sectors as manager of any of their organizations. That question was answered when I applied and won the competition for General Manager of CEMA.

Unfortunately, I did not know at the time that I was naively walking into a virtual lion's den! The organization was in a complete state of chaos—in the midst of a perfect storm.

- CEMA was hiring and firing General Managers like grain through a goose;
- A dysfunctional Board of Directors (comprised of provincial marketing boards) that was fighting over production share;
- A declining consumer demand for eggs as a result of the ill-founded relationship identified between egg cholesterol and heart disease; and
- An increasing agency debt due to the widening margin between table and industrial egg prices.

CEMA Operations

In the 1970s egg producers established provincial marketing boards as a means of stabilizing prices in respective provinces and achieved some level of countervailing power vis a vis wholesaler and retailers. As production grew, some provincial boards (Manitoba and Quebec in particular) saturated their markets and started to market surplus production into neighbouring provinces. That action sparked what has been referred to as the “egg wars” in the industry.

The rift within the egg production sector reached the point where the Federal Minister of Agriculture, Eugene Whelan, intervened to bring operational harmony

to the industry. He met with provincial ministers of agriculture and egg board representatives and together developed a structure to stabilize egg production and marketing activities. That structure consisted of:

- Establish a central marketing agency responsible for allocating production quotas among the ten provincial boards, starting with the province's historical production level. Future quota increases/decreases would be adjusted pro rata cross the provinces as determined by consumer demand;
- The central agency governance would consist of a Board comprised of a representative from each provincial marketing board with the Chairman appointed by the federal government (order in council). The staff would consist of a General Manager, operations and marketing managers, and six field staff to enforce producer quota discipline and inspect/audit processing plant egg utilization;
- The central agency would buy eggs surplus to any provincial board and resell to egg processors for use in restaurants, bakeries, hotels in bulk form as frozen yolk, whites or in liquid form,
- The agency would be funded by levies on egg production and remitted to by provincial boards to the central agency. The agency would also have the power to impose levies at the consumer level; and
- Administrative oversight of the central agency would be conducted by the Canadian Farm Products Marketing Council – a federal government appointed supervisory board.

Agreement was reached with all parties concerned and CEMA was established by federal order in council as the central marketing agency with powers to set production quotas, and to sell surplus eggs to food processors.

The imbalance between the biological laying cycle (six months of a hen's yearly production is only large eggs) while the consumer table market demands a high percentage of large eggs. Therefore, a "surplus" of small and extra large eggs is created and must be disposed of in the processing market (e.g., bakeries, liquid egg for restaurants, hotels, etc.).

During peak demand periods –Easter and Christmas – supplementary quotas are issued to egg wholesalers who are then allowed to import eggs from the USA to satisfy the table market.

Table eggs realize a higher price in the retail trade than surplus eggs for the industrial market. The latter are priced in accordance with the going USA price in order to stave off any trade dispute with American producers.

The difference between the two egg classes is offset to farmers through levies to consumers and producers to achieve a blended price for all eggs produced regardless of their market allocation.

Crisis Management – 1988 – 1990

I assumed the General Manager responsibilities of CEMA in the midst of a financial crisis. The crisis arose because the gap between table and industrial egg prices became so wide that the existing levies were not sufficient to offset the difference. As a result, CEMA had to dip into its standing line of credit. That expenditure grew from the initial \$5 million to whopping \$15 million in a matter of a few months. Needless to say, our lender was extremely nervous and demanded action to stop the bleeding (they knew we just had a few surplus eggs for security!). In addition, the Federal Agriculture Minister was getting impatient with the in-fighting, and was threatening to place CEMA into receivership, or under direct management by his department.

The stark financial and political realities of the time called for hard austerity measures to retain solvency, and to place CEMA on a path of financial recovery. They took the form of:

- A doubling of the consumer levy (much to the reluctance of our supervisory body, the Farm Products Marketing Commission); and
- A doubling of the producer levy, under protest by the provincial egg marketing boards and their respective producers.

But with support provided by Stan Stein, CEMA Chairman, we maintained that austerity regime until the price gap shrunk, and the CEMA line of Credit was under control. The bitter taste of austerity did not go away in the minds of Directors, who carried that resentment over into discussions about production cuts to match reduced consumer demand because of the cholesterol scare.

Administrative Restructuring and Strengthening – 1989 -1990

In the midst of the actions taken to salvage the organization, I set out to undertake a major overhaul of CEMA's administration. Individual management responsibilities were blurred and certain staff was not performing.

I established key divisions of responsibility and staffed with top performers who then became my management team. All actions had an objective and strategy in mind to expedite their programs.

First, Joanne Charlebois became Marketing Manager who had the capacity to launch a major campaign to reverse the downward trend in egg consumption.

Secondly, Greg Pearce became Finance and Human Resources Manager, who along with Harvey Hope (IT) led a staff team to establish a performance manager system, job classifications and salary schedules for the organization. Another onerous task of the division was to lead the conversion of the egg payment system from a volume to a component value basis.

Finally, the IT group was on the forefront of computerizing office communications and networking with the provincial boards – all to improve communications and instant data sharing.

Egg Marketing Campaign – 1992-1993

Egg consumption continued to decline as a result of the misinformation provided to dietitians and doctors regarding the correlation between egg consumption and blood cholesterol.

Under the strong and aggressive leadership of Joanne Charlebois, a comprehensive marketing campaign was launched to turn the tide.

To have credibility in our marketing message, the marketing team first had to undertake its own scientific research to refute the scanty results of the American Medical Association's (AMA) study. McGill University Medical College was chosen to undertake a comprehensive research and analysis of the relationship between dietary consumption of cholesterol (eggs) and heart health.

The results of that research clearly pointed to no correlation between egg consumption and heart health - much to the chagrin of the AMA!

With those valuable findings in our possession, the time had come to launch a major blitz through a multimedia campaign, along with face-to-face meetings with dietitians—our prime target audience since doctors totally rely on them for nutritional advice and direction. Over \$5 million was set aside in the CEMA budget to spread the message through ads on TV and in nutrition related magazines.

The campaign was reinforced by the provincial marketing boards own local campaign with the medical and other professional organizations.

In retrospect, the marketing campaign was a lesson or model for how to reverse popular perceptions based on false information. It is comforting now to see that egg consumption has now been restored to its rightful place in the consumer diet as one of nature's near-perfect foods.

Salmonella Scare and Biosecurity - 1993-1994

During the early years of my tenure, eggs were sometimes associated with salmonella outbreaks. Our Field Manager, Arnie Read was designated as the CEMA spokesperson in dealing with media and doing the detective work as to the real causes of various incidents.

Arnie was with CEMA from its very beginning. His field staff was responsible for enforcing production limits by producers and as inspectors at processing plants to ensure fraudulent action was not occurring.

Most salmonella outbreaks were usually attributed to improper handling of eggs and liquid eggs in restaurants by leaving them out near heat sources (ovens). Nevertheless, perception is reality, so Arnie took a proactive approach and introduced the first biosecurity protocol for egg producers that resulted in a high level of sanitary practices on farms - a lasting contribution by Arnie that was then adopted by other poultry and dairy sectors.

The Last Straw

The Canadian Egg Marketing Agency management and staff continued to undertake major initiatives over the years despite having to labour under a cloud of indifference by a Board preoccupied with fighting among themselves over production shares. Management was continually uncertain as to future funding since several large producing provinces often threatened to withhold their levy contributions that were required to operate the organization.

The frustration level within the Board reached the point where it was blaming management for not coming up with the "magic bullet" to resolve the battle over production cuts and allocation- like a frustrated farmer kicking the dog!

The major incident which triggered my leaving the agency was the concern by the Alberta Board over the emerging production in the Northwest Territories (NWT). Alberta in their greed, considered the NWT as their market area and was adamant that CEMA stop the new production. After months of negotiation, I proposed a compromise – production in the NWT would be capped at their domestic consumption needs, with no eggs marketed in Alberta. That compromise recommendation was rejected by the Board.

I knew then and there that it was not possible to work productively with a dysfunctional Board so I tendered my resignation.

I take great comfort in what our great management team was able to accomplish over the years despite working in the shadow of a Board that acted as a continual drag on our very strategic activities. The chronic conflict between the Board and Management created a close and lasting bond among the Staff and Management. For example, annual breakfasts are held among the “firees and retirees” to maintain friendships, and to recall past accomplishments by a first-rate team that had to constantly perform under duress.

P.S. While managing CEMA, I was asked by Eleanor Glor, a former civil servant during the Blakeney era, to contribute to a book she was writing, entitled *Policy Innovation in the Saskatchewan Public Sector, 1971-82* (the Blakeney years). It was an honour to draft the Agriculture chapter.

Chapter 12: Bangladesh Crop Diversification Project (CDP) – 1994-1996

A most satisfying professional development was the opportunity to serve as Resident Project Manager of the Canadian International Development Agency's Crop Diversification Project in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh was in desperate need of international assistance to address its many challenges. The country had its beginnings as East Pakistan (once Bengal state) during the Gandhi/Nehru leadership of India. When poorly treated by its sister state, East Pakistan revolted in 1971 and was victorious. Its name was changed to Bangladesh.

Its low-lying delta enabled Bangladesh to be once the breadbasket of Eastern India. However, poor cultural practices combined with a dense population were a recipe for financial disaster and human impoverishment:

- A mono-culture rice diet meant reduced average population size and weight;
- Vitamin A deficiency produced night blindness;
- Un-iodized salt produced goiter in women;
- Contaminated water caused widespread dysentery and early deaths of infants; and
- A heavy dependence on foreign aid and debt financing from the International Monetary Fund.

CDP Strategic Plan

The Bangladesh Government called upon Canada to help alleviate the acute nutritional crisis within the country's population.

To expedite an effective response to that request the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) contracted with Agrodev to formulate a Strategic Plan to set out in detail how Canada would address the nutritional needs of Bangladesh. Agrodev was a private consulting company in Ottawa that hired staff to plan and implement international projects.

A full year developing the plan and consulting with the Bangladesh government seemed an extraordinary amount of time. However, it proved its worth in that the resulting project resonated so well with the government and the recipient population. It proved once again that the “bottom up” approach to strategic planning has the greatest potential for ultimate success, compared to the “top down” approach (as so many international projects that were doomed to fail).

The comprehensive and integrated Plan as approved by CIDA called for a 10-year, \$25 million investment in the project, which ultimately proved to be the ***Flagship Project for CIDA and The Bangladesh Government***. It provided for a continuum of interrelated activities that encompassed all the crop production system: variety research/development, production extension, and product marketing through to consumption.

Lesson Learned: take all the time required to ensure that all parties have bought in and are totally committed to the program objectives and implementation process from the outset.

CDP Implementation

I was recruited by Agrodev President Ken Lucas and Vice President Frank Schneider for Resident Project Manager position project to lead the implementation of the strategic plan after the first Resident Project Manager retired and returned to Canada. Frank appreciated the need for marketing expertise in the advanced stage of the project as crop production requires effective marketing arrangements. When combined with my past experience managing large organizations through a team approach, I was considered the ideal candidate to lead the project implementation.

After a 29-hour flight, I landed half way around the world with my two goalie bags of supplies to hopefully see me through the assignment. A huge cultural shock hit me as I disembarked, I was met by guards with loaded rifles; rudimentary clearance and baggage collection, and a mass of people awaiting you in the sweltering heat as I exited the airport.

Fortunately, I was met by David Field, my right-hand man who guided me through the labyrinth and into the project's four-wheel drive Toyota and on into "beautiful" down town Dhaka. I stayed with David and his wife Sue for several days to rest up, and to start the initial orientation and integration into the Muslim society.

Part of my orientation week consisted of getting briefed by the outgoing Resident Project Manager, Malcolm MacGregor, a dairy farmer from Winchester, Ontario. Along with Frank Schneider, Malcolm had assembled a first-rate management team to mount the implementation of the Strategic plan. The team consisted of:

- David Field – Crop Research and Production Coordinator;
- Rosemary Peer – Human Resources and Communications Specialist;
- Art Mooney – Finance and Administration; and
- George Taylor- Hunt – Potato and Storage Specialist.

The core team was augmented by the periodic employment of agronomy specialist to address particular aspects of crop production ventures.

The key to achieve the operational buy-in from the Bangladesh government and institutions was the secondment of reputable professionals in such areas as research, home economics, and local marketing expertise.

A further essential feature of the venture was to maintain constant liaison with the Bangladesh Deputy Minister of Agriculture and other senior civil servants in the department.

Because of the huge scope of the project, CDP coordinated its work with other country agencies with common objectives, namely:

- Holland for seed production and propagation;
- Denmark for soil fertility and analysis; and
- The UK for manpower and professional extension field services.

We were fortunate to utilize the large department extension field staff in communicating our activities and crop results on a massive scale to farmers throughout the country side. The Bangladesh Crop Research Institute became an

important group to test the merits of various green crop varieties as to their suitability for viable crop production at the farm level. Crop trials were conducted for chick peas (Vitamin A), canola/sunflowers (pure cooking oil), soybeans (protein) and potatoes.

A series of field trials were launched to test the viability of various crops throughout the CDP designated regions. The trials were conducted during the drier fall/winter period between the two spring and summer rice production seasons. The thinking was to not displace the rice production and grow diverse crops adapted to cooler weather as a supplement the staple rice diet of the population.

Once we were comfortable with the crops selected, we launched a broad-based extension campaign throughout the farm community, thanks to the committed efforts of the Bangladesh Agriculture Department's extension staff.

The *results* of the extension efforts were mixed in terms of their acceptance by the rural communities. The degree of acceptance was directly related to how well the crops were able to be utilized within the dietary and food preparation processes of local families. The results were also mixed in terms of their suitability for growing conditions and storage in the regions.

Potatoes grew well in most areas, but had to be consumed fairly early because we were not able to develop an effective un-refrigerated storage facility that would prevent their deterioration.

Chick peas were well suited for the dry period in most regions and were well accepted in local diet, thus responding to the need for green food in the diet.

To achieve a canola crop adapted to the growing season, it was necessary to undertake a plant breeding program with the Experimental Station at Morden, Manitoba. We required a variety that would mature as the temperature increases – quite the opposite from the way Canola is grown in Canada and elsewhere.

Soybean production was quite viable, but not well accepted by local households because of the long cooking time that used up precious firewood, rice straw and cow dung.



Roasted soybean treats sold in markets

The crop most highly accepted was sunflowers. That is because the farmers could take the seed to the local ghani mill and produce pure oil that met their cooking needs a week at a time. Sunflowers were so well accepted that we had trouble obtaining enough seed to meet the farmer's demands-a huge success in itself. Sunflower production was sustainable. It became a regular part of the consumer diet, and the normal cooking regime of local households.



Our flagship crop-fully adapted to meet nutritional needs-pure oil, easy to grow and refine for immediate use.

Innovations and adaptations

A boon for the small farmer was the invention and use of **Tredde Irrigation Pumps**. By manually walking on treddles attached to a ground water pump, farmers were able to provide supplementary irrigation to small areas of their farms, thereby increasing crop yields and averting crop failure due to drought.

To accommodate the Muslim culture requirements, a **school and home garden program** was implemented under the leadership of Rosemary Peer. Since the culture was sensitive to the position of strangers (especially men) relating directly with farm women, the school and home garden projects were a way of circumventing the barriers, and to indirectly enhance the nutritional needs of children at home and at school. The technique employed was to provide vegetable

seeds to schools, and for them to cultivate gardens for home consumption. In addition, children were given seeds to take home and establish their own gardens with their mothers.



School and Home Garden program, led by Sophia Begum, team Home Economist.

One innovation which had limited acceptance was the manufacture and distribution of a *small moldboard plow*. On many small farms, plowing over harvested rice fields consisted of small ox pulling a root through the ground. The moldboard plow performed much better in that it actually turned the stubble and created an improved future seedbed. However, most of the small oxes were not able to pull the plow. So larger, more mechanized farmers were the main beneficiaries of that innovation.



Innovation- moldboard plow fabricated for improved rice seed bed preparation.

To provide for the sustainable development and improvement in crop varieties, several upcoming research scientists were sent to the University of Guelph for advanced training in plant genetics and reproduction. Their return to the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute ensured that it had the capacity to continue with improved variety developments suitable for local conditions.

Social Activities

The focus of all social activities among Canadian expatriates (expats) was the Canadian High Commissioner's compound. It consisted of the Commissioner's offices, short order bar and restaurant, tennis court and lounge. Expats congregated there on Fridays, our day off in keeping with Muslim laws of the country. A favourite pass time was hot pepper eating contests. We were desperate for entertainment! Unfortunately, David Field later succumbed to stomach cancer while on a future assignment in Lesoto. Tennis was the rage for the more athletic among us. However, I never really mastered the technique and game.

A true Canadian initiative was to sponsor the first Terry Fox⁴ five-kilometer race in Dhaka. It was a hoot with all the kids racing alongside us with no idea what the event was all about.

I incurred a near disaster while attending an event at the Dhaka Sheraton Hotel. I chanced to drink the banquet water, thinking it was safe. I ended up near death with a severe case of dysentery that dehydrates and kills in short order. Thanks to David Field calling the US doctor, I was able to regain my health. On field trips we always avoided drinking any local water since it was all contaminated. Instead, we would drink coconut water. The trees grew in abundance along the roadsides- a great thirst quencher on a hot day. Malaria pills were a necessity when travelling into contagious regions.

Communications with Canada by phone was a challenge, indeed. Dhaka, a city of over 13 million people, had only three long distance lines to the outside world at that time. You were required to book ahead to get in the cue. When your turn came, the operator was more interested in talking to the party in Canada than letting me use the line!

⁴ Terry Fox was a young Canadian who got cancer but faced it with determination by trying to run with one leg across Canada to raise money for cancer. He died on June 28, 1981 at the age 22. The Terry Fox Foundation continues his legacy.

Time to Demobilize

CDP was at the height of its implementation capacity and momentum when events in Canada brought an abrupt halt to the project. In the early 1990's, the Canadian economy was in the midst of an inflationary period, with the federal government running huge annual deficits (sound familiar?). Minister of Finance Paul Martin instituted massive budgetary cuts to curb the ever-growing deficit. CIDA was particularly hard hit with a 75% cut in its annual budget. That decision triggered major deduction in foreign project expenditures. In the case of CDP, it meant a total stoppage and demobilization of the project resources – human and physical.

Ironically, CDP had recently been awarded the SNC Lavelin award for the best managed international development project.

The announcement made to the Bangladesh Government brought forth a bitter reaction from the Prime Minister, who then called Canada's Prime Minister to reverse its decision. But to no avail. It gives me little comfort to know that the cost of demobilization was equivalent to two years of project expenditures.

Our team and associate local employees were dispatched, and I returned to Canada on a KLM flight to Amsterdam, then on to Toronto/Ottawa. After clearing customs, my goalie bags were closely inspected by the airport beagle who thought I had something interesting in my luggage. It turned out he liked coffee and pipe tobacco. What a relief after a long day on the road!

After a few days back in Ottawa, I spent several weeks writing up the final report on the project at the Agrodev office, and hoping that CIDA would find the means to restart the project and complete its final marketing phase. Instead, CIDA only initiated a number of small, ad hoc projects in an effort to placate the Bangladesh Government—with no success.

Thus ended my association with a most successful international development project that produced sustainable benefits for the Bangladeshi people.

Chapter 13: General Manager – Ontario Federation of Agriculture – 1997-2000

Several months after leaving the Crop Diversification Project, I was recruited by the Ontario federation of Agriculture (OFA) headhunter, asking if I would be interested in applying for the General Manager's position. Being at loose ends, I applied and reached the final interview stage after extensive personality tests.

I had heard rumblings that all was not well with Canada's largest farm organization, but let it pass. I was met at the Toronto airport by President Tony Morris who proceeded to give me a high-speed trip to the OFA's downtown office for the interview with the Executive Committee. I must say that I was taken aback by my first encounter with the Executive. One member was on crutches and another had a pirate hook on his disabled arm!

Nevertheless, the interview went quite well and I was awarded the General Manager's position. *The long and short of my mission as directed by the Executive was to essentially rebuild the organization from the bottom up.* I then came to realize what a daunting task lay before me. It was not until I got into the job that I also realized that the organization was fraught with political infighting and distrust between the Executive Committee and the Board of Directors. This revelation compounded my concern as to what could be accomplished in hostile political circumstances.

OFA Organizational Structure

Like most farm organizations the Ontario Federation of Agriculture was structured as a grass roots organization, taken to the extreme. Forty- three Ontario Federation of Agriculture Regional County Federations and representations from all commodity groups comprised the Board of Directors – approximately 100, that met monthly and held an annual fall convention. Their role was to propose policies and to conduct elections of the Executive Committee members at the annual meetings.

The Executive Committee was accountable to the Board; pursued policy development and management oversight between Board meetings. The Executive Committee held weekly meetings to oversee management action on policy implementation and administration of the organization. In turn, Management was responsible for detailed policy implementation, administration and for providing the Executive Committee and Board with policy advice and performance.

So, while the OFA had a cumbersome but workable structure, the loose and negative relationships among the structure components generated little in terms of performance results as the main advocate on behalf of its members.

Let The Rebuilding begin!

Before starting the rebuilding process, I spent several days developing a good understanding of the environment I was expected to operate. This task was accomplished by many discussions with the Executive Committee members, staff and commodity leaders.

I then began shaping a strategy designed to move the organization to its rightful place as a dynamic and proactive advocate on behalf of Ontario farmers. That strategy consisted of an interrelated *four-pronged approach* with each activity to be launched simultaneously and with a common focus and objective. Communication of the strategic objectives was paramount in order to obtain the commitment and participation of managers and staff to the new and improved operating regime.

Strategic Actions

1. Advocacy (Lobbying) Priorities

Of foremost importance was to identify those issues and concerns which the Ontario Federation of Agriculture should pursue on behalf of its members. Quite a range of issues emerged so the Executive and I had to prioritize which we should address immediately and those which could be deferred to a later date.

By undertaking this exercise in consultation with leadership, we developed a focus and lobby direction for the organization – a work plan.

We then had a basis for specific actions and performance on which members (and potential members) could evaluate the results. An example in that regard was the lobby effort to achieve “Right to Farm Legislation” to protect farmers from any complaint that was considered a normal farming practice. This legislation was of vital importance to Ontario farmers since so much of the farming activity abuts urban communities. The legislation was passed into law and was immediately implemented by the Ontario Government.

Another major action was to enhance the performance of the Provincial Crop Insurance Program, by improving its appraisal system and crop coverage.

2. Financial Reform and Transparency

Even after a cursory assessment of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture’s financial situation, I conclude that a financial framework was non-existent. Member funds were spent like “drunken sailors” – without authorization and no transparency to the Executive and the Board. That situation called for major and comprehensive reform if members are ever to have renewed confidence in the OFA Management’s use of their membership fees. In my capacity as the new General Manager, a number of actions were taken to restore the financial integrity of the OFA financial management practices. These were:

- My first action was to dismiss the current auditor who was imbedded in the organization for 17 years at an exorbitant fee. I called for tenders and hired a small local firm at half the price. Their first credible presentation at the upcoming Annual Meeting went a long way in itself to restore Director confidence in the management the OFA finances.
- My second action was to replace the existing financial system with a new computer program implemented by Henry Damsma at virtually no cost. The previous system was provided by a California firm at a huge annual fee, and provided no backup service when frequent glitches occurred. Henry was a chicken farmer from Clinton Ontario who caught my attention when I heard that he had developed the computer program for Huron County as his new-found “hobby”.

- Detailed progress reports and financial statements were presented to the monthly board meetings. That further served to enhance member confidence in the management actions to achieve financial integrity and transparency.

I would be remiss if I did not recognize the tremendous support given to me through this financial reform campaign by Terry Otto, a Director from Eastern Ontario. Terry was a strong critic of the Executive and management for their lax and indifferent approach to managing OFA's financial affairs at the outset of my tenure. A year later, he was elected to the Executive Committee, and championed the reforms undertaken to instill the financial integrity and controls so desperately needed.

3. Addressing Staff performance and management

The loose and undisciplined management style I inherited was reflected in how staff performed under that managerial environment. The 23 Field Staff lacked central direction so they justified their existence by serving their local OFA country federations in various ways with little regard for head office.

A major challenge therefore was to develop a close connection with field staff and make them an integral part of the strategic actions of the organization- to serve as a two-way conduit for policy input between the county federations and the executive policy planning process.

But first some *tough love* was in order.

I required all managers to turn in their American Express Cards as part of my efforts to achieve financial control of the organization. Managers and staff were using these cards indiscriminately for both private and work transactions.

Secondly, I introduced a new vehicle expense policy with rates based on a model vehicle – much to the opposition of several field staff who obviously took advantage of the old car expense policy.

With the tough financial control measures behind, it was time to build a positive working relationship with managers and field staff in particular.

Numerous, face-to-face meetings were held with managers and staff to communicate the new management style (e.g., weekly reporting of activities) and convey the vital role they play in furthering the objectives of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. Their confidence, a feeling of self-worth and purpose grew in short order. Their support as part of the team was gradually won over—thanks for the great local leadership of Michel Bourgon, the Manager for the Eastern Region field staff.

A measure which further improved the working connection with managers and staff was the development and implementation of *position classifications and performance review system*. The system was one more element in the drive to streamline the administrative regime of the organization. Promotion and pay were tied directly to measurable annual performance of individual managers and staff.

4. Advocacy (lobbying) Performance

In parallel with the work to achieve administrative reforms was the need to simultaneously pursue the priority policy and program issues of member concerns. At the outset I connected with the key policy managers of the Ontario Department of Agriculture in order to build trust and a positive working relationship. Of particular importance was to make positive connections with Bob Seguin, Director of the Department's policy branch. That initial effort paid off in terms of working in partnership to move policy issues into government actions.

One quickly learns that the “power behind the throne” is most often the middle managers. If advocacy efforts can get them on your side, your cause is well advanced in the process of approval by the government.

Foremost was the drafting and legislating the *Right to Farm* initiative. Having been in government for many years, I was familiar with the legislative processes. My staff and I went so far as to write the first draft of the legislation for the government, and followed through to its completion.

Another major accomplishment with the Department was to work on an enhanced ***Crop Insurance Program***. A total overhaul of the Program was required from management changes to revamping the field operations to improve member service and crop coverage.

A third policy thrust was the formulation and lobbying for a truly meaningful ***National Farm Income Stabilization Program*** in partnership with the Canadian Federation of Agriculture. The resulting program was a substantial improvement over previous support initiatives, but still short of including cost of production as a benchmark for calculating assistance.

All these lobby initiatives resonated with members and non-members alike, and served to further reinstate confidence and support for the organization.

They wanted results, and they were getting them. Accordingly, with my three and a half years with the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, annual membership grew from approximately 23,000 to 43,000.

A fourth initiative that raised the public profile of the OFA was the launching of the ***Environmental Farm Planning Program***. The OFA was contracted by the Ontario Department of Agriculture to implement a province-wide program to enable farmers to undertake environmental enhancing measures on their farms – such as manure management, fencing waterways, etc. The visits of field staff to farms developing environmental farm plans served to raise the visibility of the OFA, although in a more subtle manner.

Ice Storm Crisis Management – January 1998

An unexpected event served to test the resilience and commitment of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture's management and staff.

The January, 1998 massive ice storm wreaked havoc on farms across Eastern Ontario, causing prolonged power outages and isolation. Particularly hard hit were dairy farms that had no backup generator capacity to perform the daily milking.

OFA management and field staff rallied to the rescue of dairy farmers throughout the region by providing backup generators on a rotational basis to

salvage as much milk (and cows from mastitis) as possible. The Executive Committee office was turned into a “war room” for directing the campaign to assist farmers in the midst of the crisis. Field staff from the western region was deployed to the east in order to double the level of required assistance.

Assistance was also coordinated with the Army who had been dispatched to rescue stranded farm families. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture staff had an advantage in that regard in that they knew the exact location of farm units in the area.

The shortage of portable generators was supplemented by bringing in units from as far as Manitoba. The problem, however, was that the generators were not built for sustained operation. As a result, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture had to refurbish many of the generators before they were returned to their owners.

Every cloud has a silver lining. Out of that disaster came a new and lasting recognition of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, and its value to farmers in so many ways. It also served to solidify the connection between head office and field staff under unusual circumstances.

OFA Communications

A potentially divisive issue was associated with the future direction for its monthly newsletter. Tony Morris was a strong advocate for transforming it into a commercial weekly newspaper to serve all Ontario farmers. The venture was launched with the full complement of reporters, editor and marketers. A Subcommittee of the Executive had the oversight responsibility, reporting back to the Executive on a regular basis. The newspaper was “grub staked” by the Ontario Federation of Agriculture on the understanding that the newspaper would repay the advance once circulation and revenues grew to achieve its financial viability.

However, the newspaper was now forced to directly compete with *The Ontario Farmer*, a well-established and reputable weekly. As expected, there was not room in the limited market for the two agricultural newspapers. Circulation and revenues did not materialize. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture was faced with the decision whether or not to continue funding the newspaper. I recommended

that the Ontario Federation of Agriculture cut its losses and disband the venture. That recommendation was backed by the Executive's finance committee – Terry Otto and Ron Bonnett.

Shortly thereafter the newspaper was placed into Receivership and dismantled.

A more positive and lasting venture was the *Networking the Ontario Federation of Agriculture*. As computerization was gaining momentum, I saw the opportunity to apply its merits to fully connecting all areas of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. An initial estimate to electronically network the field staff and local counties with head office was in the order of \$600,000. During a meeting of the Board's Communications Committee, I proposed that we again engage Henry Damsma to undertake the task. As it turned out Henry saved us the \$600,000. His costs amounted to a few trips from Clinton and a few days of meals and accommodations.

Henry was further retained to program our human resources payment system and undertake the tendering for upgraded computers for office and field staff.

A reluctant Farewell

By 1999, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture was functioning as a powerful advocacy force in rural Ontario. All elements of the organization were functioning as expected. Positive member support was riding at an all-time high.

During the latter part of the year, I was courted by Stan Barber to run the Sask Milk Control Board upon his retirement as Chief Executive Officer. The offer had considerable appeal for more than just the job itself. It would provide me with the opportunity to spend considerable quality time with my aging father. Over the years I felt uneasy about not providing the required assistance to my parents. That obligation was more than filled by my two sisters and their families in my absence. Here, now was the chance to make my family contribution.

So, with a great deal of trepidation, I tearfully announced to the Executive Committee after the Annual Meeting that I would be leaving the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, effective December 31, 1999.

Chapter 14: Chief Executive Officer - Saskatchewan Milk Control Board - 2000-2007

The Sask Milk Control Board was established in the mid-1940's by provincial legislation in the midst of the tuberculosis epidemic that spread across the province and elsewhere. Milk cows often were carriers of the disease and conveyed the germs with the milk produced. Raw milk provided by farms supplying adjacent towns was often the source of contamination.

The Milk Control Board's mandate at the time was to restructure how milk reached consumers by requiring pasteurization and distribution from certified processing plants. In addition, Departments of Agriculture conducted province-wide testing of milk cows in order to eradicate the disease at its source.

As time passed, the role of the Board shifted with the advent of orderly marketing (supply management), central desk selling and milk quotas. It functioned as the central marketing authority for milk produced and sold in the province when I assumed CEO responsibilities.

Provincial milk marketing organizations took their pricing and quota management signals from the Canadian Dairy Commission, the federal regulatory agency. The Commission conducted annual cost of production surveys and used the results to set the price for butterfat and solids nonfat. It also monitored dairy product demand and indicated any need for production adjustments through changes in producer quotas. The provincial organizations adjusted their milk prices to processors and quota issuance in accordance with the Commission's directives.

Board Restructuring

During Stan Barber's tenure as CEO, the Control Board was essentially run as a "one-man show". A government appointed Board of Directors served mainly to endorse the CEO's decisions.

One of my first acts was to restructure the Board/management process by standardizing the working relationship between the two. To assist me in this task I hired Dr. John Beke to advise on the legal and regulatory aspects of the new relationship in which the Board of Directors' function was to set policy and

oversee the management of the organization. The role of the CEO was to manage the day-to-day operations of the organization and report periodically to the Board (accountability) on all aspects of management's responsibilities. Those changes in roles served the organization well during my tenure. Dr. Beke was retained as the Board's legal counsel throughout my tenure with the organization, providing sage legal advice whenever needed.

Industry Dynamics

When I assumed Chief Executive Officer responsibilities of the Saskatchewan Milk Control Board, I was under the illusion that it would essentially be "business as usual" with no significant changes in the production and marketing of Sask milk. Such was not the case!

From my first day on the job, I hit the ground running - and on a fast learning curve to keep abreast of major industry developments.

The first of such developments was the financial collapse of the provincial milk processing cooperative-the sole buyer of milk produced in the province. The cooperative had undertaken an ambitious expansion program involving buying processing facilities in other provinces at unrealistic prices. The extreme debt load carried by the cooperative was not sustainable and bankruptcy was on the horizon.

My involvement with cooperative's producer Board of Directors consisted of ensuring that the cooperative was sufficiently financially liquid in order to pay milk producers for milk delivery to the Saskatoon plant.

Fortunately, Saputo, a Montreal based cheese manufacturer, was anxious to try its hand in the fluid milk market. It purchased the assets of the cooperative at rock bottom prices. The operation of the Saskatoon plant was able to continue uninterrupted, but under new management. It took considerable effort to develop a positive working relationship with the new owners. But over time, the marketing aspect of the milk system proved to be a stable and productive arrangement.

The second development was the massive change in how the Provincial Milk Boards were to price milk to the processors. Traditionally, producers were paid on the basis of the amount of butterfat contained in the milk shipped to the processor.

That single measurement made producer payments a simple process. The processor paid the Milk Control Board on the basis of the volume of butterfat received, times the price per pound of butterfat. The Milk Control Board then distributed the revenue to producers on the basis of the individual production.

Producers came to realize that they were not receiving the full value for the milk they produced. This realization generated a wholesale change to ***component pricing*** across the country. Components consisted of butterfat, protein, lactose and other solids. The Board was ill equipped to undertake such a change in a short period of time since it lacked the technical and financial know-how to install such a massive change to its producer payment system.

Fortunately, I was able to hire Doug Miller away from Saputo. Doug was fully capable of undertaking the challenge of making the transition to the new and more complex payment arrangement. Doug was anxious to return to Regina and soon became a pillar of strength in managing the financial and other administrative duties.

To assist in the technical (IT) programming aspects of the transition, I again called upon my old colleague Henry Damsma to come and work with Doug to get the new system up and running. Together, they did a superb job of making the switch to a new and improved system that met the satisfaction of producers.

A third concern I noted shortly after my arrival was the lack of support the Board was receiving from the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce in maintaining the smooth financial flow of funds from processor to the Milk Control Board. Producers expected to get paid shortly after shipping their weekly milk supply to the processor. If the Milk Control Board did not receive the funds from the processor on a consistent basis, it had to make advance payments to producers, using a costly line of credit. Our account was managed by CIBC Bank's Vancouver Office. So, when interruptions did occur, their staff was slow to resolve any technical problems. Naturally, producers took their wrath out on the Milk Control Board for its failure to provide timely payments to producers. That weakness in the payment system had to be fixed through drastic measures.

Our Board office was just across the street from the Sherwood Credit Union (now Conexus). The President was Harvey Granatier. I was acquainted with

Harvey during his previous position with The Cooperators. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture was a major shareholder in the Cooperators, being one of the founding groups that established the original cooperative insurance company. I asked Harvey if the Credit Union would be interested in managing the financial component of the milk producer payment system. Harvey sent over his Vice President in charge of systems operation to gain an understanding of our system and our particular needs. The Credit Union concluded that it was feasible for them to handle the magnitude of the assignment. In short order, we discontinued our relationship with the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, and the Sherwood Credit Union assumed financial responsibility for the system.

The shift to Sherwood Credit Union's management of the payment system paid dividends in more ways than one. First, there were no more payment interruptions during my time as Chief Executive Officer with the Milk Control Board. Besides, we received on the spot professional service with a fee well below the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce's management fee.

In addition, the Board made close to \$100,000 annually from the financial "float". The "float" meaning the income earned from the investing of money received from the processor before producer payments are required.

Country Meetings

The Milk Control Board hosted five semi-annual country meetings – one round in early spring and another in late fall. Doug and I would report on the financial and operational performance of the Board and highlight any new developments within the national supply management system.

The country meetings then reverted to a plenary session in which any concerns could be raised and questions asked. I was shocked to experience the degree of hostility expressed by certain producers in the meetings regarding the inadequate representation of producers in managing the Milk Control Board affairs. As it stood the Board was comprised of a mixture of government appointed producers and non-producers. Tensions were high during these sessions with producers calling for the Board to be replaced by a Producer Marketing Board,

similar to those existing in other provinces and at arms-length from the provincial government.

The agitation for the Producer Marketing Board intensified of the years that I managed the Milk Control Board. The only factor which kept the change at bay was that the Milk Control Board was meeting all producer needs – timely payments, transparency through monthly newsletter communication, efficient quota transfer policy and dedicated milk transportation arrangement.

Contract Ends

After seven productive years rebuilding the Milk Control Board as its Chief Executive Officer, I felt in 2007 that I had achieved as much as I could to improve the performance of the Milk Control Board to the benefit of provincial milk producers. Although my contract had been renewed several times over the years, I chose not to continue any further as Chief Executive Officer. I took comfort in what I was able to accomplish - all within a hostile political climate that was yet to fully play out in the following years.

During my time in Regina, I was able to spend quality time with my father until his passing. In addition, I re-connected with my daughter, grandson, sister and her family after many years away.

Chapter 15: Program Development Officer – Canadian Farm Business Management Council - 2009

The Canadian Farm Business Management Council was a federal non-profit association for the purpose of providing educational material, hosting workshops and agriwebinars to assist Canadian farmers improve the management performance of their operations. It receives its annual funding from an Agriculture & AgriFood Canada grant.

Shortly after my return to Ottawa, I was asked by Executive Director Wendell Joyce to assist in updating farm business guides and administering the young farmer mentoring program. The mentoring program was a first in Canadian agriculture and served as model for future provincial and federal initiatives to introduce new farmers to the industry by on-the-job experience with established farmers.

Other assignments involved drafting major submissions for agricultural sectors seeking financial assistance from Agriculture & AgriFood Canada to apply science-based technology to their industry.

I left my position with the Canadian Farm Business Management Council when I was recruited for the position of Chief Operating Officer with the Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick.

Chapter 16: Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick – 2010 – 2013

Building and managing the Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick (AANB) proved to be a highlight in my relationships with farm organizations.

The Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick was formed by an amalgamation of the southern, English-speaking Federation of Agriculture and the French speaking northern farm organization. Impetus for the unification was the inability of each organization to remain viable with the small membership which they each represented.

A bold move to initiate the amalgamation was taken a year before my arrival on the scene. Just as the basic administrative framework for the organization was taking shape, the new CEO took a one-year maternity leave.

Little did I know at the time that the new Board of Directors had established a search committee, headed by Vice President Jennifer Macdonald to find a suitable replacement during the CEO's maternity leave. I was contacted by the Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick head-hunter in the summer and was asked if I would be interested in a temporary assignment to New Brunswick. She was from rural Ontario and was aware of my work in rebuilding the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. The head-hunter actually drove to Ottawa and spent most of the day discussing my qualifications as they related to the requirements of the job.

I was later interviewed by Jennifer and other Board members. I was subsequently offered the position as a one-year assignment. One snag in the hiring was that I was not bilingual, and the By Laws required the CEO be fluently bilingual as one of the requirements for the French speaking group to join the Alliance. The Board circumvented this problem by me holding the title of Chief Operating Officer (COO).

On my first day on the job, I was welcomed with open arms by Nicole Arseneau, the Alliance Administrative Officer. Nicole did a great job "holding the

fort” until I arrived and went to no end to help me settle into the job and the provincial environment.

Like most new situations, my first order of business was to become familiar with the all aspects of the organization. At the same time, I set out to meet with all groups and individuals who I would have to connect with during my tenure. Of particular importance was the key policy staff of the New Brunswick Department of Agriculture. ***The strategic approach I adopted was one of building partnerships and working relationships with those sharing common objectives and goals.*** That strategic approach proved to be very effective during my time with the Alliance.

Administration Strengthening/Board Relations

Although Nicole had maintained a credible accounting system, certain improvements were required if the Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick Board was to have a clear and current picture of the organization’s finances. To that end, we introduced quarterly reporting and membership updates at each Board meeting. Any particular change in financial items were highlighted and presented to the Board for discussion.

I was quite apprehensive in anticipation of my first Board meeting although I had a most harmonious meeting with the President, Patrice Finnegan beforehand. I was extremely impressed with the reception I received at the first Board meeting. In addition, the working relations and communications between French- and English-speaking members were most refreshing, productive and humorous at times-especially when I tried to speak French. The francophone Board Members would crack up with laughter! In short order, the northern French speaking members became my greatest supporters through the interpersonal relations we built together.

To achieve Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick Board oversight and proactive policy formulation, quarterly financial reports were submitted and a number of standing committees were established-finance/audit, operations, policy development and communications. This structure was conducive to greater participation of Board members on a continuous basis with management. The

committee structure also provided for obtaining their input early in the policy and program development stage before their recommendations went to the full board for final approval.

The Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick Board Members proved to be a dynamic and spirited group. What a pleasure to work with such committed and dedicated group during my tenure with the organization! As a team working together, the Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick became a powerful lobby force on behalf of New Brunswick farmers.

Well into the first year of my work with the Alliance, the current Chief Executive Officer announced that she would not be returning after her maternity leave. The Board then asked me to stay on as Chief Operating Officer until such time as they could recruit a suitable replacement. My contract was extended with no exact termination date.

After many months of recruiting through traditional means, no satisfactory Chief Executive Officer candidate was identified. So, for three years I served as acting Chief Executive Officer. Finally, in my third year, I suggested a radical departure from the normal recruitment process. I recognized the huge potential in one of our staff who was administering the Environmental Farm Plan along with John Russell, the staff member in charge of implementing the Plan. Josee Albert also served as secretary to the Board and was well respected by Board members for her performance in that role. She was also fluently bilingual, having grown up in the Grand Falls area.

I suggested to the Board that I mentor Josee for six months to learn the role and responsibilities of the CEO by working alongside me for the training period. After considering the surprise proposal, the Board agreed with this course of action as the means to fill the CEO position.

Regional Meetings

The Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick proved to be a truly grassroots organization with policy/program needs and suggestions emanating from its broad-based membership. As a general farm organization, the Agricultural Alliance of

New Brunswick focused its advocacy efforts on those issues and concerns that impacted on farmers in general, regardless of the commodity produced. Issues specific to a commodity group were left to their respective organizations to pursue. This complementary arrangement worked well by avoiding duplication of effort by the various lobby organizations.

The Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick held a round of meetings in the six regions in every fall. The President or Vice President attended along with yours truly, Alliance Administrative Officer Nicole Arseneau and Josee Albert (third year). The meetings were chaired by the President of the respective region's executive.

The meetings provided an opportunity for local farmers to have direct access to Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick leaders, receive updates on its lobby activity and hear local concerns for consideration by the Alliance for possible future action.

The regional meetings also conducted the election of their Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick Board Director if his or her term was to expire. The meetings often passed resolutions for consideration and discussion at the upcoming Annual General Meeting scheduled for the mid-January the next year. Delegates to the Meeting were also elected as the regional representatives with voting powers. A truly grassroots organization in action!

Annual General Meetings

Preparation for the *Annual General Meeting* began well before the actual event. As the Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick highlight event of the year, a full agenda was developed, with guest speakers solicited to give presentations relevant to the farming audience such as, intergenerational farm transfer, shale oil development, national income stabilization programs, etc.

The Executive and I reported on Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick activities during the year, including financial/auditor reports, lobby activity and results achieved and action taken on last year's resolutions. In my third and final year Josee Albert and I gave the CEO/COO presentations together – mine in English and hers in French. It served as a signal to the francophone audience that

the Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick was fulfilling its obligation as a bilingual organization, including all communication materials - verbal or otherwise. It also served to indicate that a leadership transition was in the offing. The Minister of Agriculture, and at times the Premier himself were invited to discuss agriculture issues, and respond to our many requests. Question and answer sessions were always most lively and demanding of the New Brunswick Government.

Considerable time was devoted to the presentation and discussion of new resolutions brought forward from the regional meetings. Resolutions that were passed became an important part of the Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick's work plan for the coming year. The final agenda item was the confirmation of the new Board of Directors by voting members at the Annual Meeting-democracy and accountability in action.

Immediately following the Annual General Meeting, the new Board met to elect members for various Executive positions for the New Year, including the election of the President and Vice President if their terms had expired.

About a month after the Annual General Meeting, the Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick Board held its first regular meeting of the New Year. At that time, I presented the Board with a draft *Work Plan* for their consideration. In addition to any administrative items, the central feature of the plan was to identify priority lobby activities for the year including strategic actions plans associated with each activity.

My advice from Vince Kilfoil, a potato farmer and founding member of the Alliance was, "focus on those actions that will put money in farmers' pockets". Good advice that guided much of the lobby activity that paid big dividends in terms of producer benefits and membership participation. They saw value in return on their annual membership dues.

Lobby Activities

I will not bore readers with the entire litany of lobby activities during my work as Chief Operating Officer with the Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick.

Suffice to highlight some of the most significant achievements that resulted in approximately \$400,000 in annual savings for all New Brunswick farmers.

Farm Fuel Tax Refund Program

The Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick partnered with the National Farmers Union to mount a concerted lobby to achieve a provincial tax exemption for fuel used “for farming purposes”. The focus of our protracted lobby effort was on the Taxation Branch of the New Brunswick Department of Finance. In a province that was severely strapped for revenues, this proved to be a hard sell. After months of intense negotiations, we were successful in convincing the government this was a sound political move as well, since the Conservative government had a large rural base. Considerable time was spent in the negotiations identifying activities constituted a “farming activity”? The next hurdle was to map out a simple administrative process for farmers to apply for the fuel tax refund. We went so far as to have Department of Finance Department Officials attend all our regional meeting to brief farmers on how to access the program. At the upcoming Annual General Meeting, we asked the Department of Finance Officials to attend when the program was announced. They were honoured with a standing ovation – partnership in action!

Wildlife Compensation Program

Most New Brunswick farmland was carved out of forest. This environment created a natural refuge for wildlife of all forms that then had a ready-made food source nearby. Producers took for granted that crop depredation from bears, coyotes, deer, moose and birds as a cost of doing business. Little did they know that in every other province, producers had the protection against wildlife damage by their respective wildlife compensation programs-an adjunct to their Provincial Crop Insurance Programs.

Of all provinces, New Brunswick producers were in greatest need for protection under such a program. To initiate the development of a provincial program, I formed a committee comprised of a cross- section of producers, and government representatives from the New Brunswick Departments of Natural

Resources and Agriculture. The committee was chaired by a prominent apple producer. To make our case, we had to estimate the magnitude of the problem in the province, and then formulate a program to meet all producer insurance requirements. We modelled the program on the Manitoba experience, which was working well in that province. The basic features of the program were:

- Compensation for up to 80% of estimated value of crop or livestock damage;
- No producer premiums associated with the program, with funding cost shared between the federal and provincial departments of agriculture; and
- The program would be administered by the New Brunswick Crop Insurance Program with their field staff serving as insurance adjusters.

When first presented to the New Brunswick Ministers of Natural Resources and Agriculture, the report was ignored by the Provincial Government. Over a period of time crop and livestock losses became highly publicized by farmers and by the media. The concern of producers reached the point where it could not be ignored by the Provincial Government. The Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick kept pointing to a solution that could not be further ignored.

Finally, at the following Annual General Meeting of the Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick, the Provincial Minister of Agriculture announced that the Provincial Government would proceed with the wildlife compensation program. Mission accomplished!

Rural Roads Program

One of the persistent concerns in mainly northern regions was the acute state of most rural roads used to access fields and take product to market. As a directive to the Alliance, Josee Albert and I formulated a plan to develop a road enhancement program that focused on those areas most in need of upgrading. Our strategy then was to meet and partner with the Planning Branch Officials in the Provincial Department of Highways & Transportation. After much resistance from the senior levels of the department, we persisted for months to make our case. With the addition of lobbying by Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick Board members, we were able to get a small line item included in the next provincial

budget-a pilot project of \$200,000 to start. Again, the government recognized the political merits of the program in that would it gave it higher profile and visibility in rural constituencies.

Seasonal Truck Licensing

New Brunswick producers were unfairly treated in having to license trucks on a yearly basis even if only used for a small part of the year. Potato growers in particular, were concerned about this onerous treatment of their situation since each producer had several trucks which were only used during the few harvest months to move potatoes from field to storage.

The Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick, along with commodity group support, argued that this unfair treatment of seasonal trucks placed New Brunswick producers at a disadvantage vis a vis those farmers in P.E.I. and Nova Scotia where farmers were able to license seasonal trucks on a monthly basis, and with a very small premium.

We were met with hostile defiance by the Director of Vehicle Licensing in the New Brunswick Department of Municipal Affairs – a crusty Scot who was nearing retirement and was not prepared to entertain any change in truck licensing while he was in the saddle. During our heated sessions with that Director, our Alliance Vice President Jennifer MacDonald often had to intervene to calm me down.

The solution to moving forward was to raise the issue to the Premier level by the Alliance President, Patrice Finnegan. By taking a broader view of the issue and the need for competitive treatment, the government eventually acquiesced to the pressure brought to bear on the issue.

Environmental Farm Plan

The Alliance was fortunate to have the opportunity to administer the Environmental Farm Plan on behalf of the federal and provincial governments. Implementing the Plan throughout the province provided the Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick with a subtle means of achieving additional visibility among

farmers, especially potential members. Alliance staff member John Russell, did a superb job of assisting producers develop and implement environmentally enhancing projects on their farms, such as fencing waterways and manure management.

Fond Farewell

My last Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick Board meeting was a teary occasion for Directors, Staff and me. Over the three plus years, the Alliance had evolved from its infancy into a powerful advocacy organization on behalf of New Brunswick farmers. That was only made possible through my leadership of various teams that often included committed Board members.

It was great comfort to receive the many testimonials from Board members and farmers for the job I did in leading the organization as its Chief Operating Officer. It was also a comfort to know that the Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick was in good hands under the bilingual leadership of Josee Albert, who continued the momentum established over the past years. The transition was complete, so my contractual work came to an end.

The intensity of the work as Acting Chief Executive Officer and Chief Operational Officer of the Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick over 3 years instilled in me a strong and lasting empathy for New Brunswick farmers and the tough issues which faced them regularly

Chapter 17: MARA Farm Settlement – Guyana – 2015

The Canadian Urban Municipality Association was under contract with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) to provide Guyanese local governments with management training assistance that would equip them to undertake a proactive role in development of their locality.

I was asked by the CEO of the Association if I would like to apply for the Consultant position to assist the MARA Farm Settlement for a month in their efforts to enhance their business affairs. Dhanraj Singh, the Guyana Project Manager, was delighted with my resume because I had a good balance of organization building and an agricultural marketing background.

On the long flight to Guyana, I was fortunate to meet fellow Canadian, Steve Feist. Steve was a retired administrator for the town of Antigonish, Nova Scotia. This was his second trip to Guyana to provide management training for local government officials in three country districts. Steve was able to give me an initial briefing about life in Guyana, and became a good companion during my four weeks in the country.

We finally arrived at our Georgetown hotel about four o'clock in the morning. After a short sleep we were whisked off to the office of the Local Government Project. There we met with Dhanraj Singh and his support staff for a briefing on our assignments.

Guyana Economic and Political Environment

Guyana can best be described as a country that is resource rich, but people poor, thanks to government corruption and fraud. Like most South American countries, it was colonized and exploited by Europeans for its wealth – first the Dutch, then the British. The country is bordered on the north by the Caribbean Sea, and on the south by the Amazon rainforest, the delta area proved to be a rich area for plantations for sugar and rice production. Mining soon emerged with the discovery of various mineral deposits, such as gold.

A unique feature of the country is the composition of its people. About one half are descendants of enslaved Africans, and the other half are descendants of South Asian indentured servants. This balanced contrast created a climate of hostility and antagonism between the two groups. The two-party democratic (?) system of government pits one culture against the other with few public services reaching the people in need, particularly those in outlying areas remote from the main cities of Georgetown and New Amsterdam.

Economically, the Guyanians South Asian descendants are generally the entrepreneurs who own and operate businesses and undertake rice production on the vast delta areas. The Guyanians of enslaved African descendants are largely the labour supply for the country with little interest or opportunity to own and operate business enterprises. As a consequence, this bitter contrast between the two cultures flares up into frequent thefts and murders.

MARA Farm Settlement

The Mara Farm Settlement was established after a group of indentured servants had completed their obligations to their masters. They were then unceremoniously dumped on a piece of low-lying land south of New Amsterdam, and abutting the northern edge of the rainforest. Left to fend for themselves, they were able to gradually eke out a livelihood through their own ingenuity and hard work.

With a population of about 200 people, the MARA Farm Settlement struggled to lift itself out of poverty and achieve an improved living standard with modern day amenities. The MARA Farm Settlement was first initiated as a Local Government District, but received little in the way of financial or technical/managerial support from senior Guyanese Government Departments. The MARA Farm Organization was both a form of Local government as well as an organization promoting the agricultural interests of the community.

What little resources the MARA Farm Organization had available were collected from local farmers in the form of a property tax.

My consultant assignment with the MARA Farm Settlement was to assist the embryonic farm community mature into a fully effective producing and marketing organization. With that in mind, I was chauffeured out to the MARA Farm Settlement by one of the Local Government officials over 25 miles of roads that were washed out or filled with old broken asphalt.

Two hours later I was introduced to the Board of Directors of the local farm organization where my driver explained to the Board why I was there. Fortunately, the Board had been alerted ahead of my visit by Dhanraj so it was no great surprise to them when I did arrive.

After brief introductions and discussion about the settlement, I humbly stated that I was there to lend a helping hand, to help them move their organization to a higher level of performance on behalf of their fellow farmers. That “broke the ice” and relaxed the Board by giving assurance that I was there to coach them along – not impose any irrelevant approach to meet their needs.

I was taken to the President’s farm where I was to headquarter during my stay in the area. The house was of the open air concept but harked back to some 50 years-no running water, phone, electricity, indoor plumbing or other amenities that we take for granted. Because of the tropical climate, we slept outside in the cooler open air of the attached veranda.

Transportation around the settlement was by motorbike since there really were not any passible roads among farms. The President gave me a motorbike reconnaissance tour of the MARA Farm Settlement. Most homes were squalid shacks, with yards full of farm equipment and small children playing games. In my assessment of the community situation, I noted that there were very few livestock on the farms. I did observe one day a lone man trailing his cows down the road to pasture with a rifle slung over his shoulder. The President explained that panthers come out of the rainforest and have a liking for beef!

My first week was devoted to understanding the economic and cultural environment I was to function within. I also set out to know each Board member personally in order to gauge their expectations and aspirations for the settlement and the functions of the farm organization. Despite the outward appearance of

poverty, the farmers displayed a high degree of ingenuity with limited resources in developing their farms and community activities.

Thanks to a rich soil, farmers were able to plant citrus (lemons and oranges) and vegetable crops with limited tillage and fertilizer requirements. They had taken upon themselves to buy and lease out a tractor/backhoe to farmers in need of digging drainage canals on low lying areas. The equipment was maintained by the Vice President who also kept records of lease activity and accounted for the revenue received in hourly rental fees.

The organization had built a small community centre and a cricket field to accommodate social gatherings. The community experienced the common problem of young people exiting the area because of limited employment opportunities. After completing their elementary school, most young people left to seek jobs or studies in urban centres.

After many sessions with the President and Vice President, I was able to develop in my mind the approach I was going to take in strengthening the capacity of the MARA Farm Settlement organization.

My first action was to meet individually with each member of the Board Executive. My purpose was to instill the exact role they play in facilitating Board decision making and subsequent action.

With the President and Vice President, I set out their leadership respective roles in both conducting meetings and other special occasions.

With the Secretary, I helped her develop meeting agendas, how to take prepare minutes, draft Board information and undertake follow up role on decisions taken by the Board. An amazing person who served as the local police constable in addition to raising six children and helping out on the family farm.

With the Treasurer, we developed a basic accounting system for the organization, including account ledger, balance sheet of profit and loss, and monthly financial statements for Board review. I advised that they obtain the services of an auditor to appraise financial transactions on a yearly basis. I pointed to the need to make bank deposits on a more regular basis because too much cash was being held for extended periods of time. I also suggested that the Treasurer

assist the Vice President in developing a more detailed accounting system for the tractor lease transactions that could then be incorporated into the general accounting presentations to the Board.

I was truly impressed by the enthusiasm shown by all executive members during these educational/coaching sessions. Despite their limited formal education, they demonstrated a unique ability to rapidly adsorb all suggestions I put forward.

My second action was to draft a comprehensive set of By Laws for the organization. Included were such items as: incorporation legal requirements, Board structure and meeting protocols, election procedures, and role/responsibilities of each board member.

Nearing the end of my stay, I drafted a complete *Operating Manual* for Board Members to use as a guide for almost all of their governance responsibilities.

To give the reader a sense of the raw Settlement life, I experienced an adrenalin- rushing incident while writing my final report sitting at the President's lean-to. A huge lizard came sauntering by my table from out of the forest with his large tongue flicking out continuously. He slowly strolled on by after casing the house surroundings, and then moved into the adjacent field. When I recovered my composure, I asked the President's wife what the lizard was searching for. She calmly replied that he was probably hunting for stray cats!

Although not in my terms of reference, I coached the Board on how to be an effective lobby organization whenever called for. It so happened that the Rural Affairs Minister was coming to the area and the MARA Farm Settlement Organization needed to take the opportunity to make its case for improved road conditions and the provision of other basic infrastructure for the area. With my assistance, they developed their case and made their presentation in a forceful but polite manner. I was impressed! I learned not too long after being there that road work was underway to upgrade the access road to New Amsterdam—a major coup for a budding organization.

Assignment Completion

As my time with the MARA Farm Organization was nearing the end, Danraj came to MARA Settlement to review what has been accomplished in my weeks embedded with local farmers. He was treated to a full well-run meeting of the Board. Needless to say, Dhanraj was truly impressed by the manner in which the Board members conducted themselves as responsible leaders in their community.

At the end of the day, we said our tearful farewells and I returned to Georgetown with Dhanraj, but in the hopes of returning at some point to see what progress the Board and community were making under the improved governance structure.

However, that was not to be. After about six months since my initial time with the MARA Farm Settlement, I was called back by the Canadian Urban Municipality Association to undertake, on a sub contract basis from CIDA, an evaluation of the project performance. I was all packed and ready to leave when I was told that the CIDA's insurance company would not cover my travel. I had just turned 75 that summer and the cut off age was 75 years. This decision was a severe blow and disappointment for all concerned, especially for the MARA Farm Settlement who were anxiously awaiting my return visit. Despite the pleas and great efforts by the Canadian Urban Municipality Association, CIDA was not prepared to authorize my trip – another black eye for CIDA.

Chapter 18: New Brunswick AgriManagement Services –2017-2018

Service Development

In 2010-13, during my work with the Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick as Chief Operating Officer and Acting Chief Executive Officer, the Executive and I would meet every few months with all Commodity Group organizations –beef, dairy pork, poultry, cranberries, blueberries, etc.

The purpose of these meetings was to update the Groups on what general issues the Alliance was addressing through its lobbying activities. In turn the Commodity Groups had an opportunity to present their particular industry issues and concerns to the meeting. While observing and listening to the various presenters, I was struck by the realization that many of the Commodity Groups were very small and could ill afford a full administrative complement. Many were managed on a part time basis by the current President, with a farm wife often “keeping the books”.

It occurred to me that the Commodity Groups would be strengthened if they shared management and financial services. That notion stuck in my mind and I shared that thought with others in the Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick.

In leaving the Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick, I was not in a position to pursue the development of that service until several years later. I was contacted by Josee Albert (now the Chief Executive Officer of the Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick) and Faith Machett (Regional Farm Credit Corporation Manager) and asked if I would be interested in returning to New Brunswick “for a few months” to spearhead the development of a central service that would provide management and accounting services to the Commodity Groups.

The development of the service had been initiated by three Commodity Group Managers working together. However, the group could not agree on the final details about how the service would be delivered. As a result, the project was

shelved, to the frustration of some key players with interest and seeing the service fully developed and implemented. Among those were Monique Mills and Robert Bourgeois of the New Brunswick Agricultural Development Association. The Association was a federal-provincial organization responsible for providing grants for agricultural development projects. Robert and Monique gained the authority from the federal and provincial governments to provide the Alliance a grant of \$100,000 left over from the closure of the Association. The grant was “to be used to the general benefit of New Brunswick farmers”.

Since I was not occupied at the time, I jumped at the chance to lead the development and implementation of the service now under the auspices of the Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick. The Alliance Board had established a committee to guide the development of the management service, with Andrew Lowell (a Board member and apple producer) as Chair.

I had not sooner put my foot down on New Brunswick soil when I was whisked to a special Committee meeting by Josee Albert. Assembled at the meeting was the committee plus representatives of all Commodity Groups and Soil & Crops Improvement Association Executive. The purpose of the meeting was to gauge the degree of support for the development of the management service. General support was indicated by the representatives, giving the Committee a vote of confidence to proceed. I was introduced to the group as the person charged with the responsibility of mobilizing the construction and implementation of the service – entitled as Interim Executive Director of the yet unnamed institution.

Following the meeting I met with Josee to work out the logistic and employment terms for my “few months” of employment. Until the new organization was up and running, I was employed by the Alliance. I would work under the direct supervision of Josee (a role reversal that worked very well) and report periodically to the committee on progress made in formulating the new service entity.

To start the development process, Josee and I agreed that I should draft a Business Plan to serve as a blueprint or roadmap for the development and implementation of the service. Included in the Business Plan were estimated projections of revenues and expenditures over a four- year period. We

optimistically forecast that financial self-sufficiency could be achieved if all Commodity Groups signed up for the service. That Plan was drafted and received acceptance by the Committee.

The next step was to liaise with the Business Development Branch of the New Brunswick Department of Justice to seek approval for incorporation of the service as a nonprofit organization. This step proved to be an onerous undertaking since it first meant decommissioning the incorporation efforts of the previous attempt to develop the service. It was only then that I was able to fulfill the requirements of Justice to incorporate the new entity. The terms of incorporation mandated the objectives of the organization, its name, location, funding arrangements and the names of officers of the corporation.

After several weeks, incorporation was achieved under the name of New Brunswick AgriManagement Services. Work could then begin to formulating the service fees and time commitments for the Commodity Group candidates. With the help of Andrew Lowell, the task was complete. We wanted the service fees to be sufficient to enable New Brunswick AgriManagement Services to achieve viability, but not undercut equivalent private sector alternatives. We used the cost of private sector commercial rates as a guide to Commodity Group rates.

Service Implementation

In the midst of meeting with the Commodity Groups, Richard Bragdon was hired as Executive Director of New Brunswick AgriManagement Services. As a past salesman, Richard led the promotion of the services to our potential clientele, while my role was to operate the service, once Service contracts were signed with any Commodity Group member.

At the end of the day, we had grossly overestimated the ability of commodity to use the service. Most small organizations just simply didn't have the revenue from their member dues to pay for the management or accounting services available from New Brunswick AgriManagement Services. The only groups which we were able to service were New Brunswick Apple Growers (Management and accounting); New Brunswick Beef Producers (accounting) and New Brunswick Pork Producers (accounting). The upshot was that the organization was running a

deficit and had to rely on the New Brunswick Agricultural Alliance grant to cover a portion of the service operating costs.

Executive Director – New Brunswick Soil & Crops Improvement Association

It came as a shock when I was told that I would serve as Executive Director of the New Brunswick Soil & Crops Improvement Association. As a non-profit agricultural association, the New Brunswick Soil & Crops Improvement Association's role was to provide its farm membership with professional agricultural extension services to improve the productivity of their soil and crops. Members paid an annual fee to obtain the assistance of one of the six agronomists located throughout the province. Management and staff salaries were covered by an annual grant from the New Brunswick Department of Agriculture. Oversight was provided by producers elected from the six regions –two per region.

The Association had fallen on tough times with the resignation of its previous Executive Director and the loss of most regional agronomists. The organization was limping along under the basic day to day management by the Board's Executive Committee. The Executive Committee had hired an accountant who was over his head in maintaining the books for the organization, and no service was provided to its farm members.

Thanks to the persuasive ability of David Goodine (a past Director from my days with the Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick), the New Brunswick Soil & Crops Improvement Association Executive reluctantly agreed to avail themselves of New Brunswick AgriManagement Services. So, in addition to my operational role with the New Brunswick AgriManagement Services, I was given the monumental challenge of “raising the Soil & Crops Association from the ashes” and rebuild it into a fully operational organization that had been providing a vital service to all farmers – soil nutrition testing and advice, and crop improvement technology.

There is an old farmer saying – “riding two horses at once gets you a little tight in the crotch”. This multi-tasking exercise proved to be exhausting.

My task was complicated, first by the reluctance of the New Brunswick Soil & Crops Improvement Association Executive to delegate the day-to-day management of operations to the Executive Director. They were accustomed to playing the role of hands-on management. We eventually reached an accord in that regard at the first Board meeting at which time I spelled out the proper division of roles between the Board and Management.

The second complication was due to the political undertones which prevailed among key New Brunswick Soil & Crops Improvement Association Board members. The Executive and the Board were dominated by two New Brunswick Farmers Union members who had great disdain for the rival Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick. They saw me and New Brunswick AgriManagement Services as extensions of the Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick. That attitude prevailed throughout my entire tenure with the New Brunswick Soil & Crops Improvement Association.

I often thought how a negative culture can permeate through an organization and impact on its morale and productivity.

I again tackled my assignment to resuscitate the organization with the three-fold approach to the challenge. First, I lured some of the regional agronomist back to the organization and recruited prime candidates for other vacant positions. Now with a full roster of field staff, I met on a frequent basis with them to instill a new sense of importance in a team out to achieve a common purpose. Moreover, I fully engaged their participation and advice when developing policy and program proposals for Board consideration. That approach paid big dividends in terms of professional assistance to producers.

Second, there was a dire need to get the Association's financial affairs in order. Fortunately, Josee Albert and I recruited Angela Gowens, a crack freelance accountant to the position of Executive Director, New Brunswick AgriManagement Services. After several weeks of tiring work the organization was placed on sound financial footing with a workable and transparent accounting system. I also took action to dismiss the current auditor who had become complacent in finalizing the annual audit. The final straw was not having a final

audit report ready for presentation to the Annual General Meeting scheduled for late February of each year.

Third, each region had its own organization structure with a Boards and Executive committees. Each region sent two representatives to sit on the provincial Board. The regional organization had also fallen into disarray along with the collapse at the provincial level. The regional organizations were instrumental in identifying local production and soil nutritional needs. With the assistance of the assigned Agronomist, action was usually initiated to address these local concerns. It took meetings with local Boards and attendance at their annual meetings to spur them into a proactive operating mode.

Another smaller, but important task was to update and clarify certain sections of the Association's Bylaws. Confusion often existed regarding the terms of office for Directors and Executive, along with their specific roles and responsibilities. In addition, voting procedures were not followed consistently throughout the organization. My proposed amendments were accepted by the New Brunswick Soil & Crops Improvement Association Board, and then ratified at its next Annual General Meeting.

Just as the New Brunswick Soil & Crops Improvement Association was operating in high gear, its Board made fateful financial decision which set the organization back on it haunches. Every fall, membership fee policy is reviewed by the Board with ratification at the upcoming Annual General Meeting. A membership fee of \$160 had been paid annually to become a member and be eligible to receive agronomy technical and professional assistance on their farm. An hourly rate was then charged for the time spent by the Association's agronomist on a farm.

Ignoring management /staff advice to the contrary, the Board leaders proposed that the membership fee be dropped to \$40, thinking this lower fee would attract a groundswell of new members. I advised that there is no way that the decline in revenue from that source could be offset by increased agronomist participation on farms. Like "lemmings to the sea" the rest of the Board went along with the misguided concept and voted to drop the fee for the coming year. As predicted, membership numbers grew slightly but not anywhere near what was

expected by Board leaders. The Association incurred a deficit cash flow for the year and had to drain its scanty cash reserves to cover the shortfall.

My final action with the Association was to mentor my replacement as “permanent Executive Director”. In my working relations with regional agronomists, Leigha Beckwith stood out as having the greatest potential to grow into the Management position. Leigha was a young graduate from Nova Scotia Agricultural College with a major in plant science. She provided excellent service to the farmers in the Central Region for several years. With Executive concurrence, I mentored Leigha for several months to prepare her for assuming the Executive Director position.

By year-end Leigha Beckwith was in a position to take over managing the Association. A timely transition since I was to immediately return to Ottawa and begin a new assignment.

On a positive note, I must pay tribute to David Goodine, whose sound advice during my two-year tenure with New Brunswick Soil & Crops Improvement Association was so much appreciated.

Chapter 19: Eastern Caribbean Liaison Service (ECLS) – 2019 -2022

The Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) is a Federation of seven Island States – a chain of islands located on the easterly side of the Caribbean Sea. Since all the Island States are small, the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States provides economies of scale so that all Island States can reap the benefit of services under this “umbrella” organization. The Island States function with a common currency, conduct free trade of goods and services among the Island States and participate in various social and economic development programs.

One means of enhancing the economic performance of Island States was the establishment of the Eastern Caribbean Liaison Service (ECLS) to facilitate the access of Island State workers to employment on Canadian Farms under the Canadian Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP). The Eastern Caribbean Liaison Office is located in Toronto, staffed with financial administrators, and field staff to coordinate the movement of workers to and from their farm employment locations

Life tends to go full circle. Even before leaving my New Brunswick mission, I was sought out by Olaf Fontenelle to join the Eastern Caribbean Liaison Service to assist him in revitalizing the organization. Immediately following my return to Ottawa, I took up his offer to serve as its Marketing Manager on a part time basis.

Olaf was a son of Steve Fontenelle, whom I had mentored while Deputy Minister, Manitoba Department of Agriculture some decades ago. Over the years I have maintained relations with Steve and his growing family, and followed the amazing career of Olaf as a United Nations Foreign Service diplomat.

After his first career as a Foreign Service Diplomat, Olaf was hired by the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States. Having proven to be an energetic and dynamic manager, Olaf’s assignment was to transform the Eastern Caribbean Service located in Toronto into an aggressive agency to facilitate the increased placement of Eastern Caribbean seasonal agricultural workers on Canadian farms.

Olaf had developed a three-year work plan that would significantly increase the participation of Caribbean workers in the program. An important component of that work plan was to draft a ***Strategic Development and Action Plan*** that would improve the administrative performance of the placement process and lead to the expansion of the geographical exposure to other regions of Canada –beyond Ontario, Quebec and B.C.

The Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) is a federally sponsored arrangement with participating countries to facilitate and regulate the conditions under which foreign workers are allowed to be employed on Canadian Farms.

The operation of the program is a complex logistical task in which ECLS acts as the coordinating agency in the dynamics of moving workers to and from their Canadian farm destinations. Farmers first apply for the number and source of their required workers in late fall-early winter. If workers are to be sourced from the Eastern Caribbean, that request is forwarded to the Ministries of Labour in the identified Caribbean country. There the Department of Labour advertises for potential candidates who are then vetted for criminal records, health status, and age. Qualified candidates are then issued Canadian visas from the Canadian High Commission Office in Trinidad. A Toronto travel coordinating agency is notified of the need and timing for transporting the workers to Canada (usually landing at Toronto, Montreal or Vancouver). They are met by an Eastern Caribbean Liaison Service Representative, who has made arrangement with the farmers to take the workers to their farms.

Seasonal Workers usually arrive in April and return home in November of the same year. In a federal sister program, workers are allowed to stay up to three years in greenhouse employment. Workers are paid the prevailing minimum wage by their farmer employer, who is also responsible for providing modern living conditions as set out by federal regulations.

The Eastern Caribbean Liaison Service had been performing its coordination function for many years, but had stagnated under poor leadership and weak communication activity with the Island States Labour Ministries, often resulting in massive logistical problems between worker placement and producer needs.

My task was to assess strengths and weaknesses inherent in the existing system, and to propose measures to strengthen its performance for the benefit of both seasonal workers and Canadian farmers. In addition, I was to investigate and assess what additional market areas the Eastern Caribbean Liaison Service should pursue in order to expand the placement of workers.

I spent considerable time meeting directly with various stakeholders in an effort to gain their perspective on the system operations. I documented their views on the weaknesses inherent in the existing logistical process and how it might be improved. I felt it was essential to gain stakeholder input if I was to obtain their “buy-in” to the report recommendations, and to the ensuing actions required to strengthen the system performance.

Having completed my extensive consultation process, I then set out to draft my report’s recommendations. The key recommendations and actions were:

1. **Strengthen Administrative Capacity** – Of paramount importance was the need to equip the Eastern Caribbean Liaison Service and the respective Island State Labour Ministries with the essential financial and staff resources to effectively perform their logistical duties and responsibilities. The existing Eastern Caribbean Liaison Service Staff was overtaxed in providing the expected services at existing levels of worker participation. Additional staff resources are a prerequisite for the Office to play an effective role, especially if it is to accommodate increased worker participation in the future.
2. **Investigate and Resolve System Logistical Failures** – A number of gaps and delays occurred in the process from the time of producer application through to worker arrival at the farm. Those instances caused major problems in the timely arrival of workers and created a negative image of the Eastern Caribbean Liaison Service in the minds of Canadian employers/producers who required timely production over a short growing period.

The Action Plan recommended that the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States commission an internal audit in collaboration with Island States’ Auditors, to identify deficiencies in the worker processing exercise, and take action to alleviate any delays in that vital system component.

3. Enhance Communication network – I observed the ongoing difficulties associated with weak communications among system participants. I stressed that they must be resolved on an urgent basis so that all staff, workers, Canadian employer/producers and Island State Labour Ministries have immediate access to information on worker/employer status within the system. I recommended that a New Data Base be developed and implemented to alleviate the communication breakdowns that occur from time to time among system participants.

4. Lengthening Trend of Temporary Worker Program – the trend of workers opting to stay for longer periods was causing a financial burden on the Eastern Caribbean Liaison Service because it was expected to provide all regular services, but did not receive any revenue to offset the cost of providing those services (income tax, processing, life insurance, medical, monitoring, etc.). The report recommended that the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States develop a new and financially equitable formula to support that program over the long term.

5. Marketing and Promotion – the report recommended that the Eastern Caribbean Liaison Service implement the market strategy set out in my previous “Quick” Agricultural Marketing Strategy (2018-2019) which called for expanding the employment opportunities for workers by: promoting the service at trade shows, producer meetings, and one-to-one producer contact utilizing modern print and video technology.

The report went on to stress the need for proper staffing of Island States Labour Ministries to cope with the current and growing application processing load. It also emphasized the need to accommodate and prioritize women applicants in future years.

Ministry of Labour Meeting

It was an honour to present my report to the March meeting of Ministers of Labour from the Island States in Barbados. I was apprehensive as to how well my recommendations would be received by the Labour Ministers, since financial contributions to the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States were always in short supply.

As it turned out, all my recommendations for the actions required to strengthen the performance of the system were well accepted, and a green light given to the Eastern Caribbean Liaison Service to coordinate the implementation of the action items in collaboration with other system participants.

The tactful leadership approach taken by Olaf paid off, as evidenced by the results achieved while implementing the report recommendations. An extremely comprehensive data base system is now up and running and performing as expected; an additional field staff person has been hired by the ECLS to share the work load associated with coordinating the placement of workers with Canadian Farmers; and initial marketing efforts were undertaken to expand area coverage and producer participation.

As a result of all the measures adopted by the ECLS and its participants, worker participation has grown annually from approximately 900 to approximately 1200 over three years.

With the advent of COVID, future market expansion efforts have been put on hold. Resources and staff efforts unfortunately must be devoted to address the many logistical disruptions caused by the pandemic.

Epilogue

As I look back over the 60 years of my professional life, I have a mixed sense of both satisfaction and disappointment.

I take comfort from the fact that several missions were sustainable and of lasting benefit to farmers in Canada and abroad.

I am disappointed to see the results of some missions thwarted by self-serving actions of governments and individuals to satisfy their political agendas.

As it turned out, I hope my commitment to public life was worth the effort, with gains outweighing the losses.

My service in underdeveloped countries gave me a new perspective on the cultural and economic disparities that exist throughout the world. One has to experience life in third world countries to really appreciate how fortunate we are to be living in Canada.

Strange as it may seem, I found returning from abroad more of an adjustment than actually going to an underdeveloped country. We in Canada take for granted basic needs such as nutritious food, clean drinking water and adequate shelter. Most third world countries are devoid of some or many of those needs, and struggle to survive from one day to the next. As an example, when I returned to Ottawa after my posting in Bangladesh, I was hesitant to drink water straight from the tap. In most third world nations, clean drinking water can be scarce in many parts of the country.

My mission during foreign assignments was always to try and fill some of those basic needs. A great deal of satisfaction was gained by providing a more balanced diet for people in Bangladesh with sustainable results. In all instances abroad the recipients of our efforts were so greatly appreciated.

In closing, I want to highlight a few lessons learned over my years as a public servant. Aspiring young public servants may want to take note.

1. ***One cannot spend enough time formulating the actions associated with implementing a Strategic Plan. A goodly part of that time should first be spent developing a deep understanding of the host country and its people- a prerequisite for the successful implementation of any project. To repeat Premier Blakeney's rule of thumb: " spend 5 percent of your time identifying your objective or goal and 95 percent of your time planning how you are going to get there".***

2. ***You cannot bat 1000 in pursuing every mission, but learn from your mistakes so you don't repeat them again when undertaking future endeavours.***

3. ***Successful leadership involves having a vision of what you want to accomplish and the ability to inspire your team through effective communications with each member so they share in your commitment to the mission at hand.***

4. ***When aspiring to more senior public service positions, let your past performance speak for itself.***

5. ***International development missions require great physical stamina and mental fortitude. The culture shock and squalid living conditions can take its toll on the hardest of men and women.***

6. ***Building a high performing team involves selecting individuals not only with the appropriate skills, but also with a mindset which sees them as making a vital contribution to the overall success of the team.***

7. ***Never raise expectations beyond what you can deliver.***

8. ***The true test of an international project's success is "Are the results sustainable in the eyes and minds of the host country and its people?"***

9. ***Do not be surprised to find politics will often override economics in policy decision-making.***

About the Author

Gerry Gartner was born at Indian Head, Saskatchewan and raised on a grain and livestock farm.

He graduated from Oxbow High School in 1958, then enrolled in the College of Agriculture, University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon. Gerry graduated in 1962 with a BSA degree specializing in Agricultural Economics.

He then joined the Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Development Branch as their Resource Economist.

Gerry returned to the College of Agriculture in 1964, receiving a MSC degree in Agricultural Economics.

After two more years as Assistant Director of the Policy Branch, Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture, Gerry enrolled in the Agricultural Economics Department, University of Wisconsin in 1967. In 1970, he graduated with a Ph.D in Agricultural Economics and Marketing.

After two years working in Ottawa for the Department of Regional Economic Expansion Department, he returned to Saskatchewan and served in several senior management positions in the Blakeney Government from 1973 to 1982, including Chief Planning Officer, Executive Council and Deputy Minister of Agriculture.

In 1982 he accepted the position of Deputy Minister of the Manitoba Department of Agriculture and occupied that position until 1988.

Gerry left government service to make a further public service contribution by working in the private farm sector and managing international development projects. These were:

- General Manager of the Canadian Egg Marketing Agency;
- Resident Project Manager, Bangladesh Crop Diversification Project;
- General Manager, Ontario Federation of Agriculture;

- Chief Operating Office, Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick;
- Consultant, MARA Guyana Farm Settlement;
- Executive Director of New Brunswick AgriManagement Services and Soil & Crops Improvement Association; and
- Marketing Manager of the Eastern Caribbean Liaison Office.

Gerry resides in Ottawa with wife Val.

