

# INFORMATION

Yukon Agriculture Branch Quarterly Bulletin

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## MESSAGE FROM THE AGRICULTURE BRANCH

Spring is just around the corner. The sun is back, days are getting longer and planning is underway for new research trials and field season work. Every year is different. Although I can't imagine a better growing season than the one we had last year, I'm hopeful that last summer was the start of a new weather trend.

There were a few changes at the branch over the winter with both Patricia Smith, Grazing Management Coordinator and Edward Lee, Agriculture Lands Coordinator, retiring and moving on to new adventures. Edward had been with the Yukon government for over twenty-five years. He had a hand in just about all of the government land sales and leases in agriculture since he joined the Lands Branch back in 1986 and then, transferred to the Ag branch in 1994. Patricia joined us in 2000 as the Grazing Program Manager for a few years, she thought, but time certainly flies when you are having fun. Besides managing the Grazing Program, Patricia worked very hard on the development of the Agriculture Safety Program, contributed many hours as the Branch Meat Inspector and offered opinions on all manner of branch business including some very helpful ones on livestock and equine health. Best wishes to both Edward and Patricia in retirement – and a heartfelt thank you from all of us for all the great work over the past number of years.

Both positions at the Agriculture Branch have been filled by people that may be familiar to you. Matt Larsen was the successful candidate in the competition for the Grazing Management position. Matt L. worked with Matt Ball as the acting Research Technician last year and has helped Patricia a number of times with her grazing field work. Welcome, Matt! The Agriculture Land Coordinator position is being temporarily filled by our own Shannon Gladwin. Shannon has had years of experience working with Edward on these files and will be coordinating land agreements, sales and leases as we set up the new position. Thanks, Shannon!



Photo: One last photo of the Agriculture branch staff before the retirement of Patricia Smith and Edward Lee. Working around the table from left to right: Tony Hill, Kam Davies, Bradley Barton, Matt Larsen, Kevin Bowers, Matthew Ball, David Murray, Patricia Smith, Shannon Gladwin and Edward Lee

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[www.agriculture.gov.yk.ca](http://www.agriculture.gov.yk.ca)

MESSAGE FROM THE BRANCH

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There have been changes across the street at the Yukon Agricultural Association as well. Former Whitehorse Mayor Bev Buckway has taken over from Sylvia Gibson as Executive Director of the association. Thanks, Sylvia and Rick, for all your good work with the YAA and the Agriculture Branch over the past few years. And welcome to you, Bev!

There is an interview with Patricia Smith in this edition of the newsletter providing her perspective as the Grazing Management Coordinator. (We will offer a perspective from Edward in the next issue of InFARMation ). We also have an interesting article on Yukon agriculture from a national perspective.

Read on and have a great spring.

Tony Hill  
Agriculture Director



## Growing Forward 2

*A Canada-Yukon initiative providing funding to Yukon's agriculture, agri-food and agri-products industry*

*Growing Forward 2 offers programs in the areas of business risk management, business development, food safety training and development, marketing, research and the environment.*

Take a look at the *Growing Forward 2 Programming Guide* on our website at [www.agriculture.gov.yk.ca](http://www.agriculture.gov.yk.ca) for funding opportunities. You can also contact the Agriculture Branch for more information or to request a hard copy of the programming guide.

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## INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF FAMILY FARMING

2014 is the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations International Year of Family Farming (IYFF). IYFF aims to raise the profile of family farming and smallholder farming by focusing world attention on its significant role in eradicating hunger and poverty, providing food security and nutrition, improving livelihoods, managing natural resources, protecting the environment, and achieving sustainable development, in particular in rural areas.

FAMILY FARMING IS THE PREDOMINANT FORM OF AGRICULTURE BOTH IN DEVELOPED AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES There are over 500 million family farms in the world.

Their rural activities are managed and operated by a family and rely predominantly on family labour.

They range from smallholders and medium scale farmers, to peasants, indigenous peoples, traditional communities, fisher folk, pastoralists and many other groups in any region and biome of the world.

FAMILY FARMERS ARE AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE SOLUTION FOR A WORLD FREE FROM POVERTY AND HUNGER

In many regions, they are the main producers of the foodstuff consumed every day in our meals.

Over 70 percent of the food-insecure population lives in rural areas of Africa, Asia, Latin America

and the Near East. Many of them are family farmers, especially smallholders, with poor access to natural resources, policies and technologies.

All kinds of evidence shows that poor family farmers can quickly deploy their productivity potential when the appropriate policy environment is effectively put in place.

Facilitating access to land, water and other natural resources and implementing specific public policies for family farmers (credit, technical assistance, insurance, market access, public purchases, appropriate technologies) are key components for increasing agricultural productivity, eradicating poverty and achieving world food security.

### FAMILY FARMING SUPPORTS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Family Farmers run crop diversification-based agricultural systems. They preserve traditional food products, contributing both to a balanced diet and the safeguard of the world's agro-biodiversity.

Family farmers are embedded in territorial networks and local cultures, and spend their incomes mostly within local and regional markets. By doing this, they generate many agricultural and non-agricultural jobs.

Local production and consumption circuits based on family farming have a major part to play in fighting hunger, especially when linked to social protection policies that address the needs of vulnerable people.

## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT PORCINE EPIDEMIC DIARRHEA

Prepared by:

Carolyn Cooper, BSc, DVM  
Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer  
Animal Health Unit  
Government of Yukon  
March 3, 2014

Porcine epidemic diarrhea (PED) is a viral disease that has infected pigs on farms in Ontario, Manitoba, Quebec and Prince Edward Island.

PED has been in the news because before January 2014, it had not been diagnosed in Canada. The first cases of PED in North America were diagnosed in the United States in early 2013.

Death losses in baby pigs can approach 100% from vomiting and diarrhea. Older pigs tend to be less severely affected although you may see vomiting, diarrhea and decreased appetites. If your pigs look sick or if you notice an increase in vomiting or diarrhea, contact a veterinarian right away.

Even though PED is a significant risk to the health of your pigs, it is not a human health or food safety risk.

PED is spread in feces so anything contaminated with pig manure is a potential source of infection.

There is no treatment for PED other than treating the vomiting and diarrhea. Pigs that survive PED become protected against reinfection. While a new vaccine has been developed its effectiveness is not yet proven. The vaccine has recently been made available to veterinarians in Canada.

The most important thing you can do to prevent PED in your pigs is to prevent disease-causing agents from reaching your animals. Biosecurity is your single best defense against introducing the PED virus, or other disease, into your herd.

Get answers to these questions before you let new pigs on your farm:

- Has the driver or truck used to haul your new pigs recently been to a PED-infected region or farm?
- Was the truck washed and disinfected after leaving the infected area?
- Was the truck washed using clean water and a disinfectant such as bleach?
- Did the driver disinfect his boots and equipment after leaving the infected area?
- Is PED present in the same area as the farm that you use to source your pigs?
- Are your new pigs from a PED-free herd?
- How is the seller monitoring for disease?

The PED virus can also be present in body fluids and tissues, not just feces. This is of concern because some commercial feed for pigs is made using pig tissues (e.g. blood products or tissue digests). These ingredients are generally added to rations for nursery pigs (3 to 10 weeks old) to increase the protein content of the feed.

PED virus was recently discovered in one component of one particular pig feed. Although a link between the affected feed and sick pigs has not been confirmed, the feed was voluntarily recalled by the Ontario manufacturer, Grand Valley Fortifiers in February. You may wish find out if there are swine-origin ingredients (e.g., plasma) in the pig feed you intend to buy as part of your biosecurity regime.

For more information, contact your veterinarian.

You can also consult the Yukon government's PED Fact Sheet online at: [www.emr.ca/infarm18](http://www.emr.ca/infarm18)

Photo: Happy and healthy Yukon pig



## FOURTEEN SEASONS AS THE GRAZING CO-ORDINATOR

After 14 long seasons as the Yukon Agriculture Branch Grazing Management Co-ordinator, Patricia Smith retired on Feb. 27.

But before we would let her move on to her next adventure, we stole some of her time to get her history and thoughts on the grazing program. The following is a question-and-answer session with the long-time employee:

### **How long have you worked as the grazing management coordinator (GMC)?**

*I started work as the GMC in May 2000. I have worked 14 seasons in the position.*

### **Who hired you?**

*I was hired by Dave Beckman who was Director of Agriculture in 2000.*

### **Why did you take the job?**

*I wanted to work in the Yukon and I was looking for a seasonal job that combined field work and office work. Also, I had done contract work with the Agriculture Branch and enjoyed working with people there.*

### **What was your first year like?**

*I had worked at various careers over the years but I'd never done any range management so the first year, I had lots to learn. When I took the job, there hadn't been anyone in the position for some time so I had lots of catching up to do.*

### **You spent time addressing fencing issues. What were the challenges and how were they mitigated?**

*A challenge of the grazing program is dealing with abandoned fencing on former grazing agreement areas. These old fences, usually with barbed wire, can stretch for kilometres. Over the past few*



*years, the Agriculture Branch has contracted with three Yukon First Nations to clean up approximately 20 kilometres of old fencing on four terminated grazing agreements.*

*Abandoned fencing is a hazard to wildlife and people using the area. It also reflects poorly on the Yukon agricultural industry. Working with First Nations to remove abandoned fencing is a positive step toward cooperation between the two levels of government.*

*Grazing agreement documents that were issued or assigned after 2010 contain a binding clause that makes grazing agreement holders responsible for removing fencing when a grazing agreement is terminated.*

*Recently, the Agriculture Branch has developed fencing best management practices for grazing agreements. Working with the Department of Environment, we have determined fencing specifications that will contain horses but will allow safe wildlife passage. These fencing specifications will be required on new grazing agreements.*

### **What other challenges have you seen over the years?**

*The biggest challenge in the grazing program is providing good quality grazing land for Yukoners in a way that doesn't degrade the environment and is compatible with other land uses.*

*The Agriculture Branch is currently working on best management practices to allow livestock to have access to water bodies on grazing agreements. We hope that the guidelines will maintain or improve the Yukon government grazing program and ensure that livestock grazed on Yukon government grazing agreement areas have an adequate and suitable water supply. The guidelines will also help ensure that ecological and water quality values of water bodies and wetlands are preserved.*

### **Have there been changes to the administration of the grazing program?**

*One of the changes that occurred during my work tenure was that the federal government devolved authority over public lands to the Yukon government. This meant that land under grazing application did not have to be transferred from the*

*federal government to the Yukon government, which shortens the time required for approval of grazing applications.*

**Have you observed changes to the grazing capability of lands or stocking rates over the years?**

*I see annual variation in the grazing capability of lands. This appears to be tied to the amount of rainfall and sunshine we get in a growing season. Grazing capacity of some areas, such as those regenerating after a forest fire, can decrease over time as natural succession leads to the growth of heavier forests and fewer grasses.*

**Have the use of grazing leases changed?**

*When the Yukon Government grazing agreement program began in 1985, most of the grazing agreements were held by big game outfitters who had large horse herds. Now, about one-quarter of grazing agreements are associated with outfitting companies. Most grazing agreements are used for grazing horses. A few are for cattle and one is for goats.*

**Is the cost of grazing leases still the same?**

*Grazing agreement fees are based on the forage productivity of the area. The fees haven't changed since the grazing program started in 1985. However, the cost of fencing has increased over the years. Fencing is the biggest cost for grazing agreement holders.*

**Have you seen any changes to the accessibility to grazing?**

*Near Whitehorse, the availability of land suitable for grazing agreements is diminishing. There are still suitable grazing lands available outside of the Whitehorse area.*

**How has technology changed?**

*When I first started with the Agriculture Branch, we didn't use GPS units to locate grazing agreement boundaries or fence line locations. Now, GPS use is routine, making field work easier and more accurate.*

**How many new grazing leases have come on line during your tender as grazing coordinator?**

*The number of grazing agreements has remained fairly constant at 35 to 40 over the years I've been on the job. New grazing agreements are issued regularly but others are terminated or relinquished.*

**Do you foresee any challenges to new entrants into the grazing programs?**

*The limited availability of suitable land for new grazing agreements is the biggest challenge to new entrants into the grazing program. Grazing Agreement areas, which are located on otherwise untenured public land, must produce enough livestock forage to be economically viable and are often significantly larger than other types of land tenure. Areas that meet both of these requirements are becoming scarcer.*

**What update do you have on the grazing policy review?**

*The consultation process that was conducted on the Grazing Policy Review has been completed. The comments that were received are being tabulated and analysed. The next step is writing a revised Grazing Policy which should occur in the next few months.*

**What other roles did you fill in the agriculture branch (ie: informal resource for animal health, meat inspector, safety advocate, Mayo representative)?**

*The Agriculture Branch is small so we all take on tasks outside of our*

*main job. I've enjoyed helping our staff build a safety program. I've also supported the mobile abattoir by doing meat inspection and I often give my opinion on animal health issues.*

**Anything else you would like to share? What was the favourite part of the job?**

*This job has given me the opportunity to visit remote and beautiful spots in the Yukon that I wouldn't have done otherwise. The interesting and varied duties and clients I've dealt with have meant the job was never boring. When I took the job in 2000, my plan was to work at it for a few years and then move on. One of the main reasons I stayed for 14 seasons is that my great co-workers at the Agriculture Branch made it an easy decision to return every year.*

We all wish Patricia the best in retirement and thank her for her professionalism to the grazing program. She has left her post in good standing and our next co-ordinator has already started with two weeks of cross-training.

Replacing Patricia as the Grazing Management coordinator is Mathew Larsen. Born and raised in Whitehorse, Matt L. comes to the position from the Yukon Department of Environment where he worked for over four years as a fish and wildlife technician. Matt has also had a stint with the Agriculture Branch as the branch's Agriculture Research Technician for six months in 2013. Matt holds a B.Sc. from UNBC in fish and wildlife management. His work and educational experience will provide insight when addressing some of the potential environmental impacts to valuable grazing lands for the industry.

## YUKON PRODUCER PROFILE

HIGHLIGHTING PRODUCERS AND THEIR AGRI-BUSINESSES

This column is an opportunity to introduce readers to farm operations in Yukon. This segment features Yukon's amazing producers, farm products and how farmers are overcoming some of our climate, production and market obstacles.

### LEBARGE RANCH

KARLA DESROSIERS AND  
LEN WALCHUK

"GOOD LOCAL HAY THAT MEETS  
OUR CUSTOMER NEEDS"

Hay production dominates Yukon's agriculture industry. With nearly \$2 million in sales, hay accounts for approximately 50% of the Yukon agriculture industry gross sales. Yukon hay producers are providing an excellent, competitive local product. In doing so, they have reduced the amount of hay coming in from outside the territory. Hay sales are predominantly for horses, thanks to Yukon's many outfitters and equine enthusiasts.

The LeBarge Ranch, owned and operated by Karla DesRosiers and Len Walchuk, is one of Yukon's larger hay producers. Ninety acres of irrigated hay production produces on average nearly 315 tonnes of hay per year from their main field. The couple also has 170 acres of dryland oat and hay in production and are currently working on developing two more parcels for future use. They also have a small business boarding horses and utilize the regrowth from the hay field to feed horses through the winter to generate additional farm income.



LeBarge Ranch is located on the North Klondike Hwy next to Shallow Bay and just before the rise to Lake LeBarge. Karla took over the farm from her Aunt Bell and Uncle Curly Derossiers in the mid 90s. She contracted Mike Blumenschein to re-work the land and bring the first field back into production. At the time she hired Mike, Karla did not have the equipment or resources to work the land herself so it was more cost effective to contract the work instead of buying equipment. In 2000, Karla met Len and, with Mike's assistance, began moving towards hay production. Through this process, they have learned and gained knowledge from an experienced northern hay producer.

During redevelopment of the fields, Karla and Len were still living in Whitehorse. Around 2004, they took the plunge and started getting serious about farming. They started investing in the farm by first upgrading the house. They then put money in to the business by purchasing an irrigation system and farm machinery that would allow them to become a major hay supplier.

Nearly six years ago, they moved on to the property. They did not become full-time farmers; Len continued as an educator, while Karla worked as a realtor. From the start, they recognized that they were busy with their careers and that adding farming to their work load would have to be planned. They identified they did not have enough time to run a wheel line irrigation system because of the many person hours required to effectively irrigate with wheel lines. Because of this fact, they invested in a more expensive automated overhead centre pivot irrigation system. The centre pivot saves time because it is a continuous system. Once you turn it on and dial in the controls, it runs itself. (In short, there is no getting up in the middle of the night to move the wheel line.) They are still paying this off, but this investment has allowed two professionals to get into the hay industry and develop their customer base without causing unmanageable stress on their time.

Karla and Len's decision to install the centre pivot identified two key things about their operational decisions that have made LeBarge Ranch a viable business. They know their operation not just from an irrigation and production standpoint but, just as importantly,

from an investment and operational cost perspective. They keep detailed books on how much it costs to run the irrigation equipment and the farm and have an eye on their inputs and returns that guide their business decisions.

The other highlight identified was their understanding of the value in developing a property with a long term vision. Investment into a centre pivot irrigation system is not only related to production; it also adds value to the property. They make infrastructure investment decisions beyond production and recognized smart investments into the farm that add value to the land. Infrastructure (buildings, equipment, irrigation) – where they put it and how much it costs – has a long term impact on the farm's total value. They also identified or shared their understanding of the ability to overinvest in the property. The centre pivot system does not sound like an overinvestment for their operational needs but they scrutinize other large investments to ensure they don't fall into the trap of putting too much money on their land.

Hay production is not without its challenges. Developing a healthy hay stand has been a learning process for Len and Karla. They initially learned from their mentor, Mike Blumenschein. Over the years, they have continued to learn through farming and experimenting. They have learned that to establish a good hay stand, you need to seed at five times the recommended seeding rate to outcompete the weeds and make up for the shorter season and harsh winters during the establishment years. It is also important to reseed poor established areas to keep weeds from finding a home. Weed management is best done by walking the fields, pulling fox tail by

hand and spot-spraying to catch weeds early to keep them from spreading. They split their fertilizer by fertilizing in the fall and again in the spring. Under the centre pivot, they can apply fertilizer at a higher rate in the spring followed by an irrigation run. For dryland fields, they apply equal amounts of fertilizer in the fall and spring to take advantage of the late fall moisture pushing the nutrients into the root zone for early spring growth.

Pulling the hay off the fields is an important time for hay producers in the territory. It is a challenge to pick the right time to cut. LeBarge Ranch cuts early, timing their cut when the stand is just ready to flower. Typically, this is in the first two weeks of July. An early cut optimizes the protein in their hay and allows for a good second growth for grazing. They bale both small squares and large rounds to meet the demands of both the larger operational customers and the smaller horse enthusiast clientele. They also supply oat bundles and are currently investigating other forage alternatives to meet the demand by horse owners for a more diverse diet for their animals. Diversifying will allow LeBarge Ranch to provide more choices for customers and further increase the consumption of local products. Reducing the amount of hay coming from outside the territory is important to LeBarge Ranch, not only because it reduces the carbon footprint but it also keeps noxious weeds from entering the territory.

Thank you, Karla and Len, for sharing your farm and business knowledge and learnings. If you are looking for hay from LeBarge Ranch, contact them early in the season because they have a lot of repeat customers and sell out early.

Contact Karla and Len at LeBarge Ranch at 668-6742 or email: [lenkarla@northwestel.net](mailto:lenkarla@northwestel.net)

### WANT TO EAT LOCAL? IT'S TIME TO...

The days are getting longer, and the changing of the season marks the time when our agricultural producers are gearing up for the upcoming growing season. For those of us who like to support and eat local, this is the best time to contact the local producers and order locally grown food. Some producers only raise or plant what they need and may produce more if they had encouragement at the beginning of the season.

For producers and hobby farmers, one might want to think of adding a few more rows of cabbage or raising a few more birds or animals, because there is a greater effort by consumers to eat local.

For a list of all things agricultural (producers, suppliers, market gardens), the 2013 Yukon Farm Products Guide is available and online.

To pick up your copy, visit Yukon Agriculture Branch, the Yukon Agriculture Association, the Fireweed Community Market or ask your agriculture retail suppliers.

A copy of the guide is available online at: [www.emr.ca/infarm13](http://www.emr.ca/infarm13)

**THE CORNER L.O.T.**  
(LAND OPPORTUNITIES & TIDBITS)

This edition of the Corner L.O.T. features an 'outside' view of the Agriculture Land Program provided by the National Post newspaper. It is fascinating to see our world viewed from a new perspective.

*David Murray*

*Agriculture Land Resource Manager*

National Post: **CANADA'S  
LAST HOMESTEADERS:**  
HOW DETERMINED PIONEERS  
TURN THE YUKON'S WILD CROWN  
LAND INTO SUCCESSFUL FARMS  
Tristin Hopper | February 14, 2014

Alan Young comes from settler stock. Born in the interior B.C. town of Princeton, he is a fourth-generation descendant of John Fall Allison, a Yorkshireman who in 1858 became the first white man to settle in the area.

Now, more than 150 years after his great-grandfather first laid eyes on the nascent colony of British Columbia, Mr. Young is following the family business of frontier pushing, in one of the few sections of Canada where that is still possible. The 60-something is on the verge of gaining title to a new 10-hectare piece of the Yukon Territory, which he intends to add to his existing ranch. To get it, all he had to do was prove to the Yukon government he had successfully turned virgin wilderness into arable farmland. He is, in a sense, among Canada's last homesteaders.

"I was in disbelief when I first came here that you could even do such a thing," said the man, who also works as an outfitter and fur trapper, speaking by phone from his Whitehorse-area farm, Midnight Sun Ranching.

"You don't see this very often any more in the modern world; it's like pioneering."



Photo: Alan Young, centre with his son, Logan, and daughter, Jessie

More than a century after Canada sent thousands of homesteaders westward to settle the newly treated Prairies, Canadian law books still contain the lingering vestiges of homesteading law.

Although the methods have changed — modern settlers are clearing the bush with bulldozers instead of draft horses — there are still parts of Canada where, with only patience, equipment and pioneer-like determination, people can literally carve their livelihood out of the wilderness.

In the early 1980s, Rolland Girouard, a born-and-raised Yukoner, was a man in his 20s with a diploma in architectural technology and designs on a future in North of 60 farming.

"I was keeping my ear to the ground ... just in case anything was to open up," he said, adding he was a frequent visitor to the territory's then-bare-bones lands office.

Eventually, by chance he "got ahold" of a land application and after some searching came upon a 50-hectare

plot of land still littered in deadwood from a 1958 forest fire that had narrowly missed levelling the city of Whitehorse.

"You had to clear the land, you had to bring it up to cultivation, you had to provide your own road system in, your own power, your own house, your own fence, your own fields — you had to do everything," he said.

"And once you did that and were able to have it producing, you were granted title to the lot."

Thirty years later, that initial plot of burned-out land has grown into Rivendell Farm, a certified organic operation pushing up everything from tomatoes to strawberries to cabbages under the midnight sun. It is now a well-known "pick your own food" destination for Whitehorse urbanites. But like many early-20th-century settlers, its owner does not romanticize its origins or the years of debt and near-collapse the operation suffered along the way.

"It's a really tough life, it wasn't fun at all, but we kept on at it," said Mr. Girouard.



Yukon's current land dispensation policy is officially called the Agricultural Lands Program. Last updated in 2006, its stated mission is to "make new land available for agriculture" and carefully avoids any mention of the word "homestead."

To qualify, applicants must have lived in the territory for at least one year (this makes them what locals would call a "sourdough") and must prove their farming mettle by filling out a nine-page "farm development plan." "Please explain how and where you plan to market your farm products so that your operation will achieve economic viability," reads question four.

The would-be landholders are then given the choice of signing up for a plot in a pre-surveyed agricultural land subdivision, or combing through government maps to hunt for their own piece of land. From there, the Yukon Agriculture Branch figures out the property's assessed value, and the applicant is then bound to perform enough improvements to equal its value.

"If it's assessed at \$100,000, then you need to do \$100,000-worth of improvements," said Wayne Grove, operator of the Whitehorse-area El Dorado Game Farm, one of the territory's largest hay operations, as well as a producer of domestic elk. Mr. Grove started El Dorado by buying a surveyed piece of land, but has since used the Agricultural Lands policy to add plots in 2005 and 2009.

As he explained, "improvements" count as any money put into the land, be it fencing, roads or a portion of a house. Even then, before granting title, government officers will also need to see a significant portion of the land cleared and covered in viable crops. Officially, "two thirds of 80%

of the land" must be "be cleared, developed and in production." It is a years-long process, he emphasized, heartily denying you are getting "free land."

"There's nothing free about it at all. If you've got to pay \$100,000 for \$100,000 of assessed land, that's not free," he said.

He also warned off any enthusiastic rookies heading up to the Yukon with designs on a 21st-century homestead. "Your chances of doing it as Joe Blow off the street are really slim," he said.

It was in 1873 — a full 10 years before the start of the Klondike Gold Rush that would inaugurate the Yukon Territory — that Canada made its first official foray into homesteading with the Dominion Lands Act.

The law handed out free 65-hectare chunks of Western Canada to male heads of households. They were required to stay on the land for three years, "prove" up the plot with a house and cultivate at least 12 hectares.

After giving away an area of land nearly the size of France, the act was repealed in 1930. Nevertheless, those provinces with empty space continued with their own land dispensation programs, often giving priority to war veterans.

As recently as 1970, for instance, the Alberta Department of Lands & Forests was offering homesteads in the Peace River area to any Canadian or British subject who had spent at least 12 months in the province.

"The land is still there for the settling," proclaimed a 1970 issue of Mother Earth News outlining the Alberta program.

Within recent memory, British Columbia also maintained 19th-century "pre-emption" laws that allowed settlers to claim any Crown land they had "improved," but the policy was phased out in 1970.

Nowadays, farmers looking to settle in the B.C. countryside will need to pick up their Crown land by the more conventional means of a public sale.

The long-ago-settled lands of Newfoundland & Labrador, ironically, probably maintain the most similar land dispensation system to the Yukon's. The Atlantic province officially offer bargain-basement agricultural leases for unused Crown land, but stops short of granting clear title to settlers.

The Yukon ramped up its agricultural dispensations in the early 1980s. In the 30 years, it has handed out 334 dispensations equalling 13,351 hectares of agricultural land — or about 35 times of the size of Vancouver's Stanley Park.

Of course, not all of this has gone into agricultural production, particularly under the much laxer dispensation laws before 2006. For every dispensed plot now producing hay or cabbages, there is land being operated under an agricultural dispensation and containing little more than a dog yard, horse stable or sprawling estate.

In many cases, goes the local gossip, that was the whole idea: Landowners planted the easiest possible crop, oats, then let the land go fallow as soon as they had title. "As long as you've shown it green,

*Continued on page 10...*

LAST HOMESTEADERS

...continued from page 9.

you get title to it, and then you're not compelled to farm," said Mike Blumenschein, president of the Yukon Agricultural Association.

"Things have changed in the last 10 years, but there's still a lot out there that are just 'I want to be a land baron.'"

Inevitably, only now is Whitehorse starting to experience what has befallen hundreds of other frontier cities: It's running out of Crown land.

Thanks to previous land dispensations and modern First Nations land settlements, it is now virtually impossible to find any land within 100 km of Whitehorse.

"If there was any available land, most of us farmers would know about it and it wouldn't be available any more — and that's what's happened," said Mr. Grove.

Which is not to say that the tide of neo-homesteading has stopped, it has just retreated even deeper into the frontier.

"It's about a 20-year project, so by the time I get it where I want it I'll probably be retired," said one such applicant, a young man looking to set up a plot in the territory's northern regions and who preferred to withhold his name.

"There's quite an appeal; you can take the land and make it what you want of it; you start from scratch."

*Material reprinted with the express permission of: National Post, a division of Postmedia Network Inc.*

*The original article contains great pictures of local farmers that can be viewed online at: [www.emr.ca/infarm12](http://www.emr.ca/infarm12)*



**P O T A T O  
M A N A G E M E N T :  
WHAT SHOULD WE BE DOING?**

In January, the Western Producer published an article by Barb Glen talking about Alberta Agriculture fight against late blight in potatoes ([emr.ca/infarm17](http://emr.ca/infarm17)).

Alberta's fields and gardens are seeing an increased occurrence of the infestation over the last several years and this problem is spreading. What was an occasional occurrence is now being seen year after year. Late blight is a major disease for Alberta potato growers and industry. It can ruin a crop, stored potatoes and the seed potato industry's reputation as a supplier of disease-free seed.

In Yukon, there have been few signs of late blight affecting crops but this is a reminder that our Yukon growers need to take the proper precautions when growing potatoes. Blight may not be present but there are other diseases that we are seeing increased occurrence of in the territory including common scab, powdery scab, silver scurf and rhizoctonia. This article outlines some of the culture practices a producer or backyard gardener can introduce to reduce disease in your potatoes, fields and gardens. These practices can also increase yields, storability and the overall quality of the potato and the land it is grown on.

Potatoes are affected by a long list of bacterial and fungal diseases and these diseases can occur naturally in the soil and environment. There are good management practices that can help reduce the introduction or development of diseases. One of the first steps and maybe most important is to avoid bringing diseases on to your field or garden. Disease can be introduced from the seed, equipment, or even the wind.

When planting potatoes, use certified seed potatoes. Although you could use potatoes from the grocery store or from last year's harvest, it is difficult to know the history of the potato and if that potato comes from an area where potato diseases are present. By using a certified seed supply, you are getting a high-quality seed that meets a legal certification for being propagated and managed to reduce disease. Certified seed does not guarantee disease-free potatoes, but it is provided from a seed supplier that manages seed borne diseases.

Another good practice is keeping your equipment and tools clean. Diseases can be picked up from other fields or gardens that may be affected. If you wash your tractor, truck, tiller, digger, shovel, hoe or any piece of equipment between uses, you reduce the occurrence of cross-contamination.

Environmental influences, such as wind or insects that spread disease, are a little more difficult to control. Late blight is an example of a fungal disease that can be carried from plant to plant when the spores are picked up by the wind. The best management practice for late blight is to watch for the symptoms. Late blight can show up as dark brown or black lesions on leaves that are not bound by the leaf veins. Under humid conditions, infected plant leaves will also develop fuzzy white growth on the undersides. Plants with symptoms should be dealt with immediately. For gardens, affected plants should be pulled and then disposed of in garbage bags. When large areas are involved, the plants should be culled, desiccated and buried. The spores cannot live long in soil, nor can they live through our cold winters. In general, good management practices in your field reduce the total impact of these environmental issues.

Soil-borne diseases that are either naturally occurring or have been accidentally introduced can be managed. The important practice is to reduce the inoculum and/or disease population in the soil. This can be done through good crop rotations. The pathogens causing the diseases survive in the soil so adequate rotations (of three years or more) will significantly reduce the disease in the soil as the source of inoculum is reduced.

There have been cases of soil-borne disease such as powdery scab and rhizoctonia in Yukon fields and gardens and effective rotations can help lower the impact on the crop. Effective rotations may require long periods where the seed potato is not planted. Although reducing access to the host plant will reduce disease presence over time, competition from other organisms in the soil also helps

reduce these disease populations. Typically, Yukon soils are cooler and lower in organic matter with less diversity of life in the soil. Fewer organisms in the soil to challenge the disease organisms can result in longer rotation before growing potatoes as a crop.

In general, producers or gardeners can diseases by providing conditions in your field or garden unfavourable to the spread of the disease. The following steps from the Idaho Center for Potato Research and Education ("Concepts of integrated pest management for potatoes" by Edward J. Bechinski and William H. Bohl) will help develop your management strategies:

- Follow a 4-year or longer rotation for disease control.
- Plant certified seed.
- For large fields, separate each field at least 1/4-mile from neighbouring potato fields to limit spread.
- Plant potato varieties for their disease resistance.
- Plant green manure crops to control diseases.
- Rogue out volunteer potato plants in rotational crops.
- Rogue out diseased potato plants.
- Control nightshade and other weeds that are alternate hosts for potato diseases (especially the *Solanaceae* family).
- Adjust fertility and irrigation practices to manage diseases.
- Plant to allow for adequate air flow through the field.
- Keep written notes or field maps about disease and problems.
- Sort off and remove decayed tubers coming into storage.

You can find the Idaho Concepts of integrated pest management for

potatoes at:

- [www.emr.ca/infarm14](http://www.emr.ca/infarm14)

For more information on potato management go to the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture and the Idaho Center for Potato Research and Education. You can find their web sites at:

- [www.agriculture.gov.sk.ca/potatoes](http://www.agriculture.gov.sk.ca/potatoes)
- [www.cals.uidaho.edu/potatoes](http://www.cals.uidaho.edu/potatoes)



Powdery Scab (*Spongospora subterranean*):



Rhizoctonia (*Rhizoctonia solani*)

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

## COMING THIS JULY

## PIG MOVEMENT TRACEABILITY BECOMES MANDATORY

Mandatory reporting of pig movements start in July. "Any movement of pigs that is on a road must be reported to a centralized database, both at shipping and receiving," said Jeff Clark, national manager of the Canadian Pork Council's Pig Trace Program.

Pig Trace is a national movement document that requires source and destination locations, numbers of pigs transported, vehicle license plate, date and time of shipping and official identification such as tattoo numbers. Farmers will need to get premises identification numbers from their home provinces as soon as possible.

For more information, producers can visit:  
[www.pigtrace.ca](http://www.pigtrace.ca)

## POULTRY HEALTH WORKSHOPS FOR YUKON FARMERS

If you raise – or plan to raise – poultry in Yukon, consider attending a free workshop on poultry health.

The Animal Health Unit and the Agriculture Branch will host a poultry health workshop in Dawson on the evening of Wednesday, April 23rd, and a one day poultry health workshop in Whitehorse on Saturday, April 26th.

You must register in order to attend these FREE workshops because space is limited. Go to [www.agriculture.gov.yk.ca](http://www.agriculture.gov.yk.ca) to view the poster and to find out how to register.

The workshops, led by a poultry veterinarian who specializes in small flock health, will address health topics for layers, meat birds, and turkeys including:

- Common diseases and health conditions of poultry
- How to recognize signs of disease and keep your birds healthy
- Nutrition
- What to consider when ordering chicks, and
- Husbandry tips.

What do you want to learn about poultry health? We want to hear from you! Email or phone Dr. Jane Harms with your questions and we will do our best to ensure that the workshops answer them.  
([jane.harms@gov.yk.ca](mailto:jane.harms@gov.yk.ca), or 667-8663 or 1-800-661-0408 ext. 8663)

## VEGETABLE EQUIPMENT FOR SALE

- C&M 2 row hiller \$2,000
- JD 2 row auto potato planter \$500
- 3 row precision veg. hoe \$200
- Holland 1 row transplanter \$500
- Stainless root veg washer \$2,000
- Stanhay precision seeder 2 units, shoes, belts \$4,500
- Wilsie 1 row potato lifter \$1,000
- Potato sizer \$200
- MF 4 furrow x 14" plough \$1,500
- JD 12' floating discs \$500
- 12' 3pt sprayer (no chemicals) \$700

For more information contact Garret by email at [garret@northwestel.net](mailto:garret@northwestel.net)

## THE YUKON AGRICULTURAL ASSOCIATION (YAA), WELCOMES MS. BEV BUCKWAY TO THE TEAM.

Ms. Buckway joins the YAA as the Executive Director, succeeding Interim Executive Director, Rick Tone.

Prior to joining the YAA, Bev served for six years as Mayor of Whitehorse. Bev holds a diploma in Livestock Production from Fairview Agricultural and Vocational College and a degree in Professional Communication from Royal Roads University. Many Yukoners also know Bev through her work on numerous boards and committees.

To learn more about the YAA, please call Bev at 867-668-6864; e-mail [admin@yukonag.ca](mailto:admin@yukonag.ca); or visit YAA website at [www.yukonag.ca](http://www.yukonag.ca)

## InFARMation is:

A Yukon government newsletter published by the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, Agriculture Branch. If you would like to add or remove your name from the newsletter mailing list, comment on an article or contribute a story, please feel free to contact us.

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