

FarmLINK connects retiring farmers with eager newbies

With many farm operators nearing retirement age, the service provides an alternative to just putting up a 'For Sale' sign

BY HELEN LAMMERS-HELPS
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Like many farmers, Cathy McKay has a successful farm operation but the next generation wasn't interested in carrying it on.

McKay, who owns Nature's Bounty Farms, a 27-acre pick-your-own apple orchard in Port Perry, didn't want to just sell to the highest bidder. "I don't want to put up a 'For Sale' sign at the end of the driveway because it's difficult to know what someone would want to do with the farm," she said.

Instead, McKay posted a unique opportunity for a beginning farmer on the FarmLINK.net website about a year ago. FarmLINK is a platform that matches those looking for a successor with those looking to get started in farming.

Twenty-seven-year-old Rob Alexander of nearby Whitby was one of the people who responded. Alexander didn't have any farm experience but he was keen to leave his marketing job to try farming.

"I didn't just want a job on a

farm, I wanted to learn and be mentored for it to go somewhere," he said.

After meeting several times, the two of them hammered out a one-year full-time position for Alexander and if all goes well, he'll take over the farm.

It's early days but so far all is going well for both parties. Although the pair live only 20 minutes apart, it's unlikely they would have connected without FarmLINK, said Mel Luymes, FarmLINK's Outreach and Engagement Lead.

"You can find keen people you wouldn't meet otherwise."

This example illustrates the value of the new-and-improved FarmLINK.net matchmaking site, said Luymes. Farm seekers can find details about properties for sale or lease, succession arrangements, or mentorships, while retiring farmers can connect with those looking to enter farming.

Although the platform was first created a decade ago by FarmStart, an organization dedicated to supporting a new generation of farmers, the new version has many features that make it much more powerful and user-friendly.

While the original FarmLINK site was Ontario-based and tended to feature small, organic vegetable farms, the new version is Canada-wide and geared to all farm types, said Luymes.

The upgraded version also has



Potential farmer Rob Alexander and apple grower Cathy McKay connected through the FarmLINK farm matching site for retiring and potential farmers.

some very useful features including search filters, a private messaging function and speedier loading. Educational webinars and a resource database are also available through the site.

There are currently 235 active farm seekers. Luymes encourages seekers to be open-minded about possible opportunities. "Sometimes you don't know

what you're looking for until you see it."

With more than half of all farm operators over the age of 55 but only eight per cent of farms reporting that they have a written succession plan, this service is a valuable tool for retiring farmers and would-be farmers. There is currently no fee to create a profile or search the system.

FarmLINK is also joining forces with municipalities such as Wellington County and invites other potential partners interested in collaborating.

Luymes said she is very excited about the new-and-improved FarmLINK matching service. "I've seen what it means for people who now have someone to transfer the farm to."

Training, resources developed for livestock trucking mishaps

First responders often don't know how to handle injured or trapped animals when a truck has rolled over

BY LILIAN SCHAEER
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Hamilton - There are a lot of livestock on Canadian roads every day, travelling often long distances to new facilities or on their way to market. A traffic emergency involving livestock adds a layer of complexity to an already serious situation – and more often than not, first responders aren't sure how to handle injured, trapped or dead animals at an accident scene.

It becomes even more challenging in remote areas, like the long stretches of highway through northern Ontario where resources – and towns – are few

and far between.

Recognizing this as an issue, Farm & Food Care Ontario teamed up with Beef Farmers of Ontario (BFO) for a transport emergency response project last year, accessing funding through the Agricultural Adaptation Council.

"Canada is a big country and we ship a lot of livestock. There is an issue with emergencies, especially with rollovers – it happens in southern Ontario but also in Northern Ontario where resources are sparse and even more thinly distributed than in the south," said Farm & Food Care Ontario Program Manager Bruce Kelly in a presentation at the summer meeting of the Agricultural Adaptation Council last month.

The project began with a needs assessment that involved BFO staff, members and directors as well as the OPP and other first responders, transport

associations, the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

This was followed by several training sessions with first responders, who know how to handle human emergencies at accident scenes but are less familiar with how to best manage livestock that are injured or trapped inside a trailer that has flipped onto its side into a ditch.

"It's important to know who to call when a transport emergency has happened and to know what resources are in the area that you can call on to help deal with the animals," Kelly said.

The project also involved development of a livestock truck emergencies policies and procedures manual. It includes suggested roles and responsibilities for different groups of rescuers, from first responders to the transport

company, tow truck drivers and the newly created Ontario Cattle Emergency Network (OCEN).

OCEN is a network of cattle farmers located across Ontario who have been trained to provide support at truck rollover scenes, including helping with livestock handling, sourcing necessary supplies like temporary fencing, and contacting other resources like large animal veterinarians, holding facilities and replacement trucks.

The new manual also includes worksheets and contact information for transport companies and livestock yards, facts on large animal behaviour, cattle handling tips and how to make decisions about injured or compromised animals. An inventory of resources in Northern Ontario, including available penning or live-

stock trailers, was also completed.

The resource was distributed to 450 Ontario fire chiefs and training officers last fall, with a letter asking about their training needs related to livestock emergencies. According to Kelly, feedback came in throughout the winter, illustrating that demand is there to help responders be more effective at handling these types of situations.

"This was step one. We've clearly seen that the need to train emergency responders is huge – it's not just truck rollovers but also things like barn fires and barn fire prevention, and we hope to be able to fill that void in the future," he said, adding Farm & Food Care Ontario is working with other farm groups on a funding application for a follow up project.