

# Fair Fields News

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## On the Farm

Well, it has been an exciting and busy time on the farm over the. Many of you probably heard and some experienced the heavy storms that came through southwestern Ontario last Sunday. From the farm, the two waves of weather we received Sunday evening were amazing and humbling to watch and a little bit terrifying as well. Whenever we have events that big I start to worry about the greenhouse and hoop house, the drive shed and of course the crops in the field. As it was a storm that produced a tornado not that far from here, we feel lucky that all we lost were a glass patio table, a tray of lettuce seedlings and our leafy greens in the field. You will notice this week that the lettuce greens are somewhat roughed up. We have tried to sort through our harvest, but recommend you eat your greens

quickly this week, as damage they received from heavy wind and hail will greatly shorten their life.

After the turbulent weather wrapped up on Tuesday afternoon a cold front set in. This has led to very cool night time temperatures, especially out in the field, which has slowed down the hot crops. We are hoping for some more seasonal warm weather to help the melons, eggplant, peppers and tomatoes ripen to perfection. We could also use a little more heat for ourselves!

We have been giving you lots of fresh garlic over the last couple of weeks. We are trying to give more garlic this year, as people were keen to receive more last year. This initial surge is also to help move garlic we thing won't cure and store as well. We would like to

remind you that fresh garlic should be kept in the fridge, as it is vulnerable to spoilage until it cures more fully. It should be done curing by mid-next week, as long as we get some higher temperatures, more conducive to curing.

Ripe red raspberries are starting to appear in the patch. We hope there will be enough of a quantity in a week or two to start giving them to the CSA. Shortly after that we will open up the patch to U-pick, free for the CSA and for sale to non-members. We will keep you posted on how they are progressing.



## Harvesting

- **Beets**
- **Carrots**
- **Chard**
- **Cucumbers**
- **Garlic**
- **Green Peppers**
- **Head Lettuce**
- **Herbs**
- **Kale**
- **Melons?**
- **Onions**
- **Peppers**
- **Raspberries?**
- **Salad Mix**
- **Tomatoes**
- **Zucchini**

## Farm Open House

This year instead of a pot luck with activities before hand, we will be doing a more casual open house.

We are planning it for **Saturday August 15th**, from **2—7 pm**.

We will be throwing some food on the **BBQ** during that time and enjoying it with some **salads** and my **homemade beer**.

We are welcoming our members, friends and family and encourage you to bring yours as well and enjoy a **tour of the farm** and some food and beverages with us.

Please **RSVP** if you think you will come so we can get a sense of numbers.

Hope to see you there!

Devan, Nicole, Lilly and Kassia

## *The Conservatives on Agriculture?*

In past seasons I have tried to keep politics out of the newsletter. Recently I have realized that politics very much affect farming and in turn the CSA you are all a part of. As members of the CSA you are the community that is making this farm and this type of farming work. In this light, I think it is important for me to share some of the issues facing farmers that I am learning about so that you may know about how to best support farms and farmers like myself, who are providing you with food.

As we head into the federal election campaign I think it is important to highlight some of the policy and regulations developed by the Conservative Party of Canada and how they negatively impact farmers and control of our food system. To highlight these I will briefly talk about the dissolution of the Canadian Wheat Board and parts of Bill C-18, the *Agricultural Growth Act*.

The Canadian Wheat Board (CWB) was a single desk marketing agency mainly for western wheat and barley producers. It was established in 1935 to more efficiently organize the marketing and distribution of Canadian grains domestically and abroad, and to ensure fair incomes for farmers, who were previously at the mercy of large grain elevators and railway companies. In previous years companies had extracted as much wealth as possible from poor farmers, who eventually began participating in movements that lead to the development of new political parties and the CWB. From that time till 2012, when the Conservative government unilaterally disbanded the organization, the CWB guaranteed good prices for prairie farms in all locations and of various sizes.

The CWB was efficient and because of its monopoly status, was able to secure good prices for Canadian grain. This agency was farmer-controlled and subsidized. Grain farmers in the west paid dues that helped the CWB build infrastructure and operate. Despite this, on August 1, 2012, legislation came into effect that dissolved the CWB. The Conservative government did this without first holding a binding farmer vote, required by law under the *Canadian Wheat Board Act*.

Since that time the Conservatives have given away CWB assets that farmers built through their dues over almost 8 decades. These assets were given to large multi-national and state corporations including an investment company of the Saudi Arabian state. Essentially a Canadian farmers' agency developed and funded by Canadian farmers to protect them from greedy corporations was illegally disbanded and assets given to those very corporations. How the Conservatives justify giving a Canadian public asset to a brutal dictatorship that promotes terrorism in the middle east and abroad is beyond me, but that is exactly what they did.

Bill C-18, the *Agricultural Growth Act*, recently passed despite much protest and concern from farm organizations. As I understand it, the two main areas of concern with this omnibus bill are changes to the Advanced Payment Program, a government agricultural loan system, and to Plant Breeders Rights (PBRs).

To understand the implications of changes to the Advanced Payment Program it is first important to understand the context for farm debt and farmland ownership. After the financial and food crisis of 2008, agricultural land started to be seen as an important investment both in terms of a

secure food supply and an economic investment. Governments around the world started buying up farmland in various areas to avoid future food crises. Investors, including pension funds, saw agricultural land, constantly on the rise in value, as a stable long term investment, at a time when many other investments were crumbling. In this context Canadian farmland started being bought up by foreign governments and investors alike.

Farm debt has also been on the rise. The farm income crisis continues to worsen. At the same time more credit is being offered. While this has allowed farms experiencing low incomes to obtain much-needed cash for buying inputs and infrastructure, it has also made them less stable. Many of the loans have been at low interest rates. When interest rates rise and especially if there is widespread crop failure, these loans will become unpayable and farmers could stand to lose their land.

Changes to the Advanced Payment Program under Bill C-18 allows farmland investment companies to access this funding, previously available only to farmers. This program provides low interest rates and a long payback period. As a result those same companies buying up farmland for investment will be able to reduce the cost of financing their operations and apply savings to further land purchases, exacerbating farmland access problems that already exist.

Also, security requirements for these loans, which formerly depended on marketable inventory, is likely to be expanded to include land, buildings and equipment. As with private sector loans, this means that when interest rates rise and farmers experience crop failures these assets would be vulnerable.

More problematic still, is the effect Bill C-18 will have on farmers' ability to save and re-use seed. Through seed saving and selective breeding, farmers have been improving the food crops we rely on for thousands of years. In recent years corporations have been aggressively seeking control over these farmer bred crops by making small changes and then patenting the resulting seed. Bill C-18 takes this much further by giving these Plant Breeders exclusive rights to authorize all reproduction, conditioning, stocking, hybridizing, vegetative reproduction, importing and exporting of Plant Breeders Rights-protected varieties of seed for 20 years. Plant Breeders can also demand payment of royalties as a condition for using varieties in any of the above ways. Essentially farmers won't be able to save any seed that has a copyright on it, including seed for replanting the following year unless they gain permission and pay royalties, and if they do, will be subject to litigation by larger corporations with high powered lawyers.

In 2004 the Canadian Supreme Court ruled 5-4 in favour of Monsanto against Percy Schmeiser, who's canola seed had been contaminated by Monsanto's round-up ready canola. They argued that regardless of how their seed or genetic material came into his fields, he was not allowed to save and replant seed that contained that material. With changes to the PBRs this precedent has the potential to be applied to most commercial varieties of food crops.

Furthermore, if Plant Breeders decide they want to discontinue the sale of a variety, they can stop farmers from continuing to use it, which could lead to varieties becoming extinct. At a time when the number of crop varieties world-wide is decreasing at an alarming rate and climate change is impacting the viability of the varieties that are left, this reduces the genetic pool for future breeding, adding further instability to an already fragile food system.