

Got Milkers?

Pilot program offering new workplace skills

by Wes Keating

THE three-legged stool and bucket are no longer the only workplace essentials for the professional cow milker. A pilot program launched by the Workplace Essential Skills Training Centre in Steinbach, in February, will fill in the gaps for half a dozen adults interested in starting a dairy career in the milking parlor.

The training centre is running a pilot program in partnership with five local dairy producers to better qualify milkers for employment on their farms.

The first six participants are nearly halfway through twice-weekly classroom sessions to improve their communication skills, their ability to work with others as a team, and improve their critical thinking skills to go with the job.

Facilitators Diane Stadnyk and Mariette Kirouac are instructors for the new program, which was initiated with five partnership dairy farms. The group sessions in a classroom in Steinbach are complemented with once-a-week training sessions in area barns. The final five weeks of the 14-week program will be exclusively on-the-job training, with instruction provided by experienced dairy producers.

Jasper and Aukje Vos at Vos

Dairies, southwest of Mitchell, are one of the partnership farms and welcome the opportunity to participate in the pilot program.

Jasper Vos says that after seeing an advertisement about the proposed pilot project, he went to a meeting and found it was all about giving people a second chance.

"I'm always in favor of that. Participants in the program have made a statement that they want to do something with their lives. Losers have excuses, winners have a plan."

Vos says there is always a difficulty getting good milkers and a lot of people will try out, and it is not too long before they decide it is not what they want to do.

With the Workplace Essential Skills Training program, it will be our job to teach the participants how to milk cows and interact with cows. It will be their job to teach them how to interact with people, Vos said.

Right now Vos Dairies has the milkers it needs, Vos said, but depending on how they do, pilot program participants will be considered for employment in the future.

Voss stressed that milking cows is more than "just a job". It is the most important job on the farm.

"Three times a day we are making money harvesting milk. We



Facilitators Diane Stadnyk and Mariette Kirouac (standing) with David Tetreault, Crystal Klassen, Robert Hrechka, Cody Iverson and Jeff Epp, members of the first class of milkers in a new 14-week Workplace Essential Skills Training program in Steinbach.

spend the rest of the day spending money."

Today, farming is a technology driven business. The time has passed when it was believed that if you couldn't do anything else, you could always farm. At

the same time, Voss said it is not necessary for milkers to be efficient with all the technology but they do need to be familiar with the digital displays in the parlor.

When WEST announced the new program in January, there

was no shortage of applicants and the original response resulted in a list of over 50 possibles.

The Steinbach training centre concentrated on applications from the Southeast. Fourteen were on hand for the initial barn tour at the beginning of pilot program Feb. 21. Of those, Stadnyk said, nine decided they wanted to

do something else or had found employment elsewhere.

The six "students" range in age from 21 to 62 and if their enthusiasm is any measure of the success of this type of training, the program will be moving beyond the pilot stage before long.

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Heather Voss and Amy Brown take a break from their duties at Vos Dairies to show milker program students Cody Iverson and David Tetreault how machines are automatically rinsed.

Nine essential skills for every workplace

THE Workplace Essential Skills Training Centre (WEST) offers customized training and free assistance to upgrade any of the nine essential skills needed to succeed in every occupation, including the trades, in every workplace.

1. Reading at work. Reading and understanding written information in the many different types of workplace documents.
 2. Document use at work. Finding and using the information you need, putting the information where it is needed and constructing document displays, are all document use tasks.
 3. Numeracy at work. Using numbers and thinking mathematically to measure and make calculations, working with money and creating schedules and budgets.
 4. Writing at work. Using the written word to create a clear message.
 5. Oral communication at work. Talking with others to give, receive and exchange information and ideas.
 6. Working with others. Leading, coordinating or collaborating with others on work activities.
 7. Thinking skills at work. Using a thinking process to solve problems, organize and plan, find information, remember things and make decisions.
 8. Digital technology at work. Using information and communication technology.
 9. Continuous learning at work. Applying strategies which support workplace learning and the ability to adapt to change.
- The Workplace Essential Skills Training Centre in Steinbach is located at Unit 14-90 Brandt Street. Visit WEST Centre Steinbach at westcentremanitoba.ca for much more information.



Diane Stadnyk talks with Jasper and Aukje Vos about the pilot training program for milkers at Vos Dairies, southwest of Mitchell.

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Members of the group have different reasons for signing up, but they all agree the twice-a-week group sessions at the training centre have been most helpful.

Cody Iverson, who lives in Steinbach, says he thought the program offered him a positive change to his life and the opportunity to learn new skills.

Crystal Klassen, of Lorette, was raised on a farm, loves animals and wanted to try something new.

Anthony Klassen, who hails from British Columbia, returned to Manitoba with the idea of getting a job and going back to school. The milker pilot program has given him a chance to learn how to communicate better with people and his first impression of the dairy barn was a positive one.

"It smells like olives. And I like olives."

The oldest member of the group is Robert Hrechka from Vita, who has worked in the hog industry as well as on dairy and beef opera-

tions. A friend suggested the program, so he is taking the course, to see what comes of it.

Former truck driver Jeff Epp says he chose the program because he wanted to work with cows. He has spent a lot of time driving locally in the agricultural field, but was missing interaction with people except for conversations at stops along the way, or if someone rode along with him. He is particularly enjoying group activities and the team work involved.

David Tetrault of La Broquerie also has previous dairy farm experience and says he is in the program to help him develop gross mindset skills, and how to communicate better with people.

The Workplace Essential Skills training Centre in Steinbach has been open since January of 2014 and focuses on teaching nine essential skills, working with a wide variety of work places, individuals, trades qualifiers and apprentices.

Kirouac, who along with Stadnyk, has been a program facilitator with the Steinbach centre since it opened, said the milker training program was available for adults looking for employment or a way to advance their careers. Part of the training will be paid for by the participating five dairy farms. Other funding partners for the training program include the Keystone Agricultural Producers (KAP) and Manitoba Industry Training and Employment Services (ITES).

At the conclusion of the nine weeks of classroom training, the milkers will be training fulltime in area barns for the following five weeks. Workers will be paid for this full-time on-site training, Kirouac said.

A decision on an extension of the milker training program will be decided after discussions with barn partners at the end of the pilot program.

Carillon flashback May 21, 1965



Joe Chorney demonstrates his two-tractor team on his farm five miles north of Garson.

Two tractor team farms 460 acres

by Wes Keating

JOE Chorney, who farms some 460 acres, says the tractor was a wonderful invention but what would be even better than one tractor would be two working in tandem with one operator.

He wanted to be that operator, so he invented a system where he can hitch two tractors together to double the horsepower.

To save a lot of time in the

busy spring season, Chorney hitched his two big John Deere tractors together, one behind the other, with a long steel shaft. He has extended bars from the controls of the rear tractor to where he can reach them from the front tractor.

With a 12-foot double disc and a 12-foot deep tiller, he can go much deeper with this operation and it doesn't pack the land as badly as with one tractor.

Chorney says he has been

using this system for three years and it "works like a charm". It's even better than four wheel drive, for when one tractor bogs down; the other keeps the equipment moving.

What one tractor does slowly and poorly, Chorney's tandem set-up does quickly and well. The work he can do with the two 40-horsepower tractors hooked together he could never do with a four-wheel drive, he says.

Governments invest in grain quality and storage

THE governments of Canada and Manitoba are investing nearly \$484,000 in equipment and infrastructure needed to conduct specialized research projects on grain preservation and storage.

Funding will be invested to complete the Prairie Agricultural Machinery Institute's (PAMI) grain innovation facility near Portage la Prairie. This includes basic infrastructure needs, as well as specialized equipment such as hopper bins, a grain weighing wagon, lighting, conveyors, ventilation fans and related research instruments.

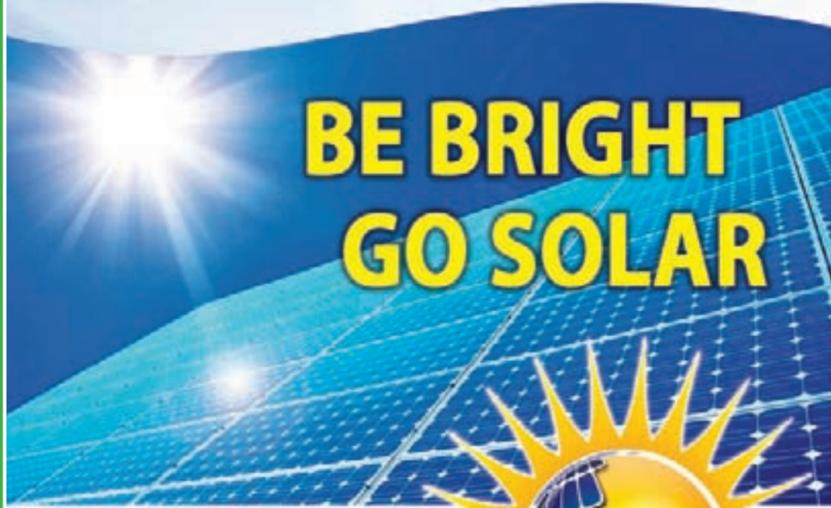
Once complete, the results of the research at the grain innovation facility will be used by the farming community and agribusiness sector.

PAMI is a non-profit applied research, development and testing organization, serving the agriculture industry in western Canada and internationally. It directly employs 11 people in Portage la Prairie and surrounding areas and completed 126 agricultural research projects last year. Its work is directed by an independent board of producers and the Manitoba and Saskatchewan governments.



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Farmers to give peas a chance

by Phil Franz-Warkentin

TOTAL Canadian pea acres are likely to be down in 2018 as export challenges have cut into prices. However, Manitoba could be an outlier, with increased area to the pulse crop a strong possibility.

"People are interested in growing peas, but there's caution there," said Francois Labelle, executive director of Manitoba Pulse and Soybean Growers, pointing to past issues with disease. Members of the organization recently attended a meeting in Brandon, hosted by Manitoba Agriculture, discussing the potential for growing peas in Manitoba.

Peas "are a good pulse crop for producers to grow, but there are some challenges along the way," said Manitoba Agriculture Pulse Specialist Dennis Lange, echoing the disease issues with the crop that will play into how expansion happens.

Manitoba saw its largest pea acreage in 15 years in 2016, with 163,200 acres seeded to the crop. However, that year was extremely wet, which hurt quality and yields, and acres subsequently dropped back in line with the previous 5-year average with only 65,000 acres planted in 2017.

The 2017 pea crop benefitted from drier weather, and yields were very good in some areas, said Lange. While there are still plenty of question marks going into the 2018 growing season, conditions are on the drier-side to begin with across much of the province, which could sway some

interest towards peas.

The prospect of increased local demand is also drawing more attention to peas in Manitoba.

Roquette, a French-based processing company, is in the midst of building a plant in Portage la Prairie that will have the capacity to process 100,000 tonnes of peas a year. The facility is expected to be operational by the fall of 2019. Manitoba only grew 80,300 tonnes of peas in 2017/18, according to Statistics Canada data. The company will likely need to bring in peas from Saskatchewan, but will pull as much as possible from closer sources.

"There's always interest (in growing a crop) when there's a local market," said Labelle.

He related a story of a Manitoba producer who had liked growing peas in the past, but stopped due to the excessive freight costs of moving it to buyers in Saskatchewan.

"Our association is hopeful that people will try some peas this year, just to get them back in the rotation and build understanding on producing (the crop)," said Labelle.

"Having more pea acres will help not only Roquette, but other companies in Manitoba that are also dealing with peas," said Lange. He didn't expect a large increase overnight, but rather sustainable growth as peas will still face challenges on wet years in Manitoba.

Phil Franz-Warkentin is a writer for *Commodity News Service Canada*.

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