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Family Road-Trip

For the Thouvenels, custom cutting is truly a family affair.

Better Late Than Never

Despite being innovatively inclined, Nick and Matthew Scharf were among the last farmers in their part of Saskatchewan to switch to MacDon FlexDrapers.

The Great Race

Bobby Hadskey and G.R. Pike win the 2016 Great Race in a MacDon co-sponsored 100 year old car.

Classroom in the Field

Agriculture in the Classroom is helping reconnect Manitoba's youth with agriculture.

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Family Road-Trip

For the Thouvenels, custom cutting is truly a family affair.




Custom harvesters are, by definition, confident people. After all, if your livelihood depends on being able to cut any crop no matter how bad the conditions, it helps to have a little faith that things are going to work out in your favor. Two people who exemplify that type of positive attitude are Garrett and Aubree Thouvenel, a husband and wife team that see it as no big deal to take on the rigors of each year's harvest with their two young daughters in tow.

The Thouvenels have had their daughters travelling with them – Maycee (9) and Jaydee (4) – since they were infants, bringing a whole new meaning to the words family business.



“Going to MacDon’s draper was just night and day. The difference was noticeable in wheat, but even more so in soybeans.”





"They really don't know any other life than being on the road with us," said Aubree when Performance Magazine caught up with the Thouvenels mid-way through the fall soybean harvest near Grant, Nebraska. "They are just used to coming along wherever we go, so they are pretty laid back about it all."

The girls' take-it-as-it-comes attitude is a mirror image of that which has been exhibited by their parents since the very start of their 20 year career as custom harvesters. Back in the mid 90s, when the Thouvenels went on their first harvest, they certainly didn't foresee it as something that they would still be doing two decades later. Neither of them come from a harvesting background; Aubree was not from a farm, and Garrett's dad was a lineman for the local electrical cooperative. Garrett's primary contact with agriculture was through raising cattle near his hometown in Versailles, Missouri, something he had been doing on his own since his youth.

"I started buying steers when I was 10 or 11 years old and my little operation grew," said Garrett. "By the time I was in high school I had about 40 mama cows."

Garrett's first taste of custom harvesting came at graduation when he was looking for some summer work to complement his cattle business. He joined a local harvester crew for the 1996 harvest as a truck driver, and the job quickly led to an opportunity to get into the business for himself.

"I took it as just a job, never thinking I would become a harvester. But the guy I was running with was starting to slow down. He had a used combine sitting at home, so I bought it from him and Aubree and I went along with him for the next year. The year after that we went out on our own."

As a couple of kids fresh out of high school, the day to day demands of custom harvesting quickly put their can-do natures to the test.

"We were just 20 years old when we got started, not even old enough to drive a truck out of state without a custom harvester exemption. We were running a worn out 1985 Massey Ferguson combine with a 24' (7.3m) header. That thing was broke down more than it was running. I didn't know how to change a bearing or anything. Of course I couldn't afford to hire to have it done, so we had to figure out stuff for ourselves."

Keeping their machine running was only the first hurdle they had to overcome. They also had to find contracts.

"We felt a little like outsiders. It was definitely a challenge to approach someone to see if we could harvest their crop for them, because we didn't know anybody. Being so young also worked against us. No one would come out and say 'boy, you're awfully young' but there was definitely a little hesitancy with them hiring us, especially when they saw the old combine we were running."

"Back then there wasn't the internet. To try to find jobs we literally went knocking from door to door at places that looked like they needed some wheat cutting. We also went to the grain elevators

and asked around. For those that gave us a chance, they could see that we were hard working and dedicated. We felt that we really had to try hard to do a good job and do exactly what they wanted to get their crop off."

"We were just 20 years old when we got started, not even old enough to drive a truck out of state without a custom harvester exemption."

After two fall harvests and one wheat harvest, getting those contracts became a little easier when they decided to bite the bullet and buy a newer combine.

"I told Aubree if we're going to go broke, we might as well have nice machinery doing it. So in the fall of '98 we purchased a used 9600 John Deere combine. I'm not sure what the salesman wrote on our credit application but he got us our combine and away we went. It was so much newer and man you could run all day without having a breakdown. I think I ran that whole fall season without a breakdown. I just couldn't believe it."

It was the turning point for their business and, through persistency and hard work, they slowly gained customers. Today their business has grown to two combines (John Deere S670s) and three employees. The company works solid from May through November, servicing customers in Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota and North Dakota. In total they will cut between 12,000 and 15,000 acres (4,856 and 6,070 ha) of wheat and small grains during the summer harvest with their MacDon headers as well as harvesting dryland and irrigated corn. They finish up with about 500 acres (202 ha) of soybeans in Nebraska and then return home to Versailles, where the Thouvenels manage a herd of 250 cattle.

Garrett says that up until about 2007 they relied on conventional auger heads to do their harvesting, but then they decided to try MacDon FlexDraper. The results were dramatic.

"Going to MacDon's draper was just night and day. The difference was noticeable in wheat, but even more so in soybeans. Before, with the auger headers the soybeans just wrapped so bad that we had significant shatter loss. But the FlexDraper® was just much more gentle on the crop. There was no doubt in my mind that we had made the right decision to switch to MacDon.

His customers also agreed.

"The farmer we're currently working for here in Grant, Nebraska, made the comment when we first started using MacDons that they did a much better job. He said that his neighbors had even noticed and it wasn't long before many of those neighbors were using MacDons as well."

Garrett says that they have run FlexDrapers every year since then, except for a brief period in 2011 when his dealer offered him a package deal on a competitor's draper table.

"But as simple as these headers are, it's amazing what they can do, especially with a bad crop in front of you. Downed wheat doesn't scare me anymore; I used to stay up nights worrying about that downed wheat, but no more."

"I got quite a discount, so I thought I would try them. However, by the time we got to Oklahoma, I called my dealer back and asked him if he had sold my MacDons yet. Unfortunately, he already had, so I told him to order me two new ones because I don't want these anymore. I kind of learned the hard way to stay with MacDon."

"What I like about MacDon heads is their simplicity and longevity. There's not a lot of hydraulics and electronics to give you trouble. For example, I believe they are using the same wobble box they have been using for years. I have never had any problems with the wobble boxes. MacDon's got it right; if it ain't broke, don't fix it."

"But as simple as these headers are, it's amazing what they can do, especially with a bad crop in front of you. Downed wheat doesn't scare me anymore; I used to stay up nights worrying about that downed wheat, but no more."

"For example in North Dakota this year we had some wheat that was downed and lodged. Now, there's a few rocks up there in North Dakota, but we just put the MacDons in Flex mode and away we went. These FD75s just bounced up and over rocks, and we got everything. If you hadn't seen how ugly the field looked before you might not have believed it."

Another bonus of using FlexDrapers for the Thouvenels is the FD75's optional transport package, that allows the operator to quickly and easily detach the header and safely tow it behind the combine for road travel.

"If we move less than 80 miles (129 km), it's usually faster to road the equipment than loading our equipment on trailers. So rather than have someone go and get our header trailers that are 10 or 15 miles (16 or 24 km) away, we'll use MacDon's transport system because it is much faster."

Critical for every custom harvester is the quality of a manufacturer's field support, and Garrett says that he has been more than pleased with their experience with MacDon's crews.



"As a custom harvester, you never know for sure where you are going to be, so being able to obtain parts quickly is always a concern. But we've had MacDon Harvest Support drive 80 or 100 miles (129 or 161 km) to come help us out. For example, we hit a rock right in the middle of the header once, bending one of the rollers. MacDon's crew drove close to 100 miles (161 km) and got to us about 5:00 or 6:00 in the evening, and it was well after dark before we got the header straightened back out. They stuck in there and got us going again."

"We also like MacDon's custom harvester breakfast that they hold in Vernon, Texas, every year at the start of the harvest. We always try to attend that because there's lots of useful information. For example they will point out what to check for if you are running a two or three year old header, or talk about the changes on the new headers. They are just very informative, especially about things that affect safety."

But Garrett isn't the only one in the family who looks forward to that first stop in Vernon every spring; Maycee and Jaydee also can't wait.



Left to right; Maycee, Garrett, Aubree and Jaydee

"They're excited every year when we start out," said Garrett. "They don't know of all of the stresses that come along with harvest. For them they are just going to new places and seeing people that they haven't seen for 12 months."

Aubree says that raising children on the road – especially infants – was something that she and Garrett initially had hesitations about, but their "we'll make it work" approach to things gave them the confidence that they could handle it.

"Our main concerns with Maycee, our first one, were just the day to day issues of raising small children," said Aubree. "Questions like how I was going to feed her on a certain schedule, or how I was going to heat up a bottle. Well, I figured out pretty quickly that warming up a bottle was not an option, and so she lived on mixing up bottles out of a water jug. She survived. No matter the situation, you just figure it out, and it always seems to turn out ok."

"People have asked us what effect taking the girls on the harvest has had on their development and I think that it has definitely benefited them. Maycee's teacher has commented that she has a little bit more to offer to class discussions. She's just been exposed to a lot of different places and experiences that most kids haven't had."

Compared to many families today, with one or both parents working, neither Garrett or Aubree can be accused of not spending enough quality time with their daughters. During the day, while Garrett is operating the combine, the girls usually ride with Aubree in the grain truck. Afterwards, they are almost never apart.

"We are anything but not close," said Aubree. "All four of us are usually within a 10 foot (3.05m) radius of each other. I always say that one guilt we will not have is not spending enough time with our kids, because we can't possibly spend any more." **M**



Better Late than Never

Despite being innovatively inclined, Nick and Matthew Scharf were among the last farmers in their part of Saskatchewan to switch to MacDon FlexDrapers.



In Perdue, Saskatchewan, the Scharf name is known for more than the family's 13,000 acre (5260 ha) farm located west of town. It's also tied to the town's spectacular 18 hole golf course (Perdue Oasis) as well as the product EZEWRAP®, an internationally distributed kitchen plastic wrap dispenser that has become a very successful business for the family, which is celebrating its 30th year. Both businesses were the brainchild of the late Jim Scharf, who believed strongly in giving back to the community he loved.

"He was an entrepreneur with a big heart for our small town," recalled son Nick Scharf. "I can distinctly remember when the national news came out here to do a story on him, he was asked why he kept the EZEWRAP in Perdue; after all, there's no reason in the world that a business like this should be here. But I remember dad telling them 'if the plant was in Toronto or down in Mexico, what would that do for Saskatchewan? What would that do for Perdue?'"

"With the extra moisture we thought we should try to find ways to reap similar yields to those experienced in other parts of the world."

With Jim's unexpected passing in 2009 at the young age of 56, Nick (30) and his brother Matthew (29) suddenly found themselves at the helm of the family's operations. Neither of them had time to manage the golf course (or golf for that matter), so they leased Perdue Oasis to a management company to run on their behalf. Their mother Bruna has continued to carry on with the family business of EZEWRAP headquartered in Perdue, leaving the brothers to focus exclusively on the farm and its three employees.

The brothers farm wheat, canola, lentils and peas. The dramatic effects of climate change have brought significantly more rain to the area; so much rain in fact that the brothers are changing the way they farm.

"It's raining so much now it's like having irrigation some years. With the extra moisture we thought we should try to find ways to reap similar yields to those experienced in other parts of the world with higher rain levels. So we went on the internet and used Google to do some research."

The brothers kept coming across the name Phil Needham, a crop management specialist who runs Needham Ag Technologies, LLC., out of North-Calhoun, Kentucky. Phil's company works with farmers through the midwest helping them employ intensive European crop management systems to increase their yields.

"We just called him up and he told us a couple of things to try on our wheat. He suggested we put a stream bar on our sprayer and top dress during the plant's growth, so we purchased a set of bars from him and tried it. The first wheat crop we had was crazy. We normally get upwards of 50 bushels to the acre with our hard spring wheat, but that year we got 90 bushels. It was nuts! We have been hooked on top dressing ever since."

Scharf says that it can be tricky top dressing fertilizer like this, and it is not without its risks.



"The first field we got into, we thought wow, there's nothing left; these headers got everything!"

"We top dress our wheat once in the growing season, right after herbicide application. Last year we tried it with our canola as well. As far as we know we are the only farm in the area trying this. It's difficult to do because canola requires precise timing, and you have to do it in the rain at flowering so you don't burn the plants. As such, you can't do the whole farm because you can't count on it raining every day."

Last year's canola test resulted in a 20% to 30% increase in yield over their normal yields. The Scharfs couldn't be certain if the results were a fluke or not, so they repeated the test again this year. At the time of interview, the Scharfs still had much of their canola in the field, but were optimistic the top dressing had been successful.

"We flew the field with our drone and took an NDVI (Normalized Difference Vegetation Index) image of it. The photo showed a distinctly stronger growth pattern between the part of the field we top dressed and the part we didn't, so it certainly looks promising."

But top dressing is not the only alternative cropping practice the brothers have employed to be more successful. Other examples include seeding all of their crops by population (even though it's more work) and harvesting their lentils at much higher moisture levels than normal.

"Something else we do differently is that we will use a grain dryer as a management tool, as opposed to just emergencies. For example, we'll grain dry our lentils in August sometimes, to harvest ahead of the rains and save the grade."

The Scharf's willingness to try innovative cropping methods would make one think that they are also early adopters when it comes to equipment. Surprisingly, they are not.

"We kind of take a wait and see approach when it comes to trying new technology. There's nothing worse than buying the first one out and then you have to spend most your time fixing it."

That reluctance meant that when the Scharfs purchased new MacDon FD75s for their three New Holland CR8090 combines this spring, that they were some of the last farmers around Perdue to own FlexDrapers.

"Previously, we were using three rigid drapers for our grains and three flex augers for our pulses. We thought we would just use the new MacDons for straight cutting our grain, and still use our old flex tables on our pulses because we were skeptical about how they would perform cutting close to the ground."

"But the FD75s were more than impressive. Because of the rain this year both our lentils and peas were really flat. You could put a pop can in the field and the can would stick above the peas, which had been originally four feet tall. Initially, I was a little nervous because I didn't know how the FD75s would hold up when we started hitting dirt at times, like you



Left to right; Nick Scharf, Matthew Scharf, Willie Cotterill, Calvin Boobyer and Wayne Gamble

do when harvesting pulses. I thought they would be stalling and there would be nothing left by the end of harvest. But they flexed just fine."

Even more remarkable for the Scharfs was how clean the FD75s left their fields.

"The first field we got into, we thought wow, there's nothing left; these headers got everything! We've also been impressed with how rugged these headers were for us this year. We haven't had to do anything to them. I mean, try to find a guy who did 2,500 acres (1012 ha) of pulses on each header this year without a problem."

Performance like that sold the Scharfs on the merits of the FlexDraper®, giving them the confidence to get rid of their old flex tables. Now they are harvesting all of their crops with just the one header.

"We're just in love with these headers. It's really neat how easy it is to switch from flex to rigid

mode; it's a two second job. We also like how easy it is to clean out the draper with the holding pan underneath. Maintenance is nothing, there's just a few grease nipples here and there. These headers are plug and play."

But the FD75s are not the only MacDon product that has impressed the Scharfs recently. They are also enjoying their MacDon M155 Windrower purchased to cut their canola, which they only started growing in 2013. But before buying the M155 they did a little homework first.

"If you talk to a guy who custom swaths for a living, he can tell you a thing or two about windrowers. Well, we're good friends with a custom swather outfit out of Coaldale, Alberta called Magill Farm & Field Services. Every year he buys five new MacDons because he needs something that will keep him in the field, something that works good. Now, this is a guy whose best friend is a swather dealer for the

competition, but he is wall to wall MacDon. He said to us he would challenge anyone to bring any swather into a field and keep up with his MacDons."

With that endorsement, the Scharfs purchased one of his used MacDons, a decision they say they haven't regretted, just like their FD75s.

"We'd been happy with the headers we were using, but everyone else around here was using FD75s. We just thought they weren't cutting as many pulse acres as we were, so they could get away with using just one header for all their harvesting. But now that we have them we understand. I guess you could say we were a little late to the party, but we're certainly glad we finally got here." 

The Great Race

Bobby Hadskey and G.R. Pike win the 2016 Great Race in a MacDon sponsored 100 year old car.

Describing it as “the hardest thing to win I’ve ever been involved with,” Bobby Hadskey and his partner G.R. Pike navigated their way across 2,600 miles (4184 km) of American backroads in their MacDon co-sponsored 1916 Hudson Indy Racer to win the 2016 edition of The Great Race. It was the second time Hadskey and Pike had triumphed in the vintage car event, 2004 being the first time they had made their championship run.

“Winning this year was just a thrill, because we entered with absolutely no expectations,” said Hadskey. “We were coaxed to enter by our good friends David Reeder and Sawyer Stone who also have a 1916 Hudson. They said to us you have to race with us because we both have vehicles that are a century old.”

Inspired by the 1965 movie *The Great Race* starring Jack Lemmon and Tony Curtis, The Great Race has been run since 1983 when a small group of “like-minded car nuts” thought that it would be a cool idea to take their antique vehicles out of the show rooms and pit them against each other in a precision driving game that tested both their vehicles and personal endurance. Since then the race has been run almost every year, each time attracting vintage car enthusiasts from across

the world. Along the way they can encounter an array of possible perils including freak snowstorms, slow trains, mechanical breakdowns, road washouts, indifferent animals (both wild and farm) and, of course, impatient drivers.

In truth The Great Race is actually misnamed, as it is not actually a race at all, but rather a timed, long distance, multi-day rally where the top speed is never more than 50 mph (80 km/h). Each morning competitors are handed a set of driving instructions that require them to follow a prescribed route, indicating up to 250 starts, stops, turns and speed changes that they must make throughout the day. Cars are started a minute apart and must hit a series of checkpoints at a specific time. Teams are scored by how close they can match each interval time, and such is the skill of the participants that victory is often measured in seconds when the results are tallied at the end of the race.

“Just to finish the Great Race is a big deal,” said Hadskey. “It’s such fun to be with all of the old car guys, with the many friends we have made over the years. This race is a passion that we all share.”

This year’s event was a nine day affair, starting in San Rafael, California, on the north side of San Francisco’s Golden Gate Bridge,



Bobby Hadskey and G.R. Pike in the 1916 Hudson Indy Racer

then tracing its way along the Lincoln Highway to finish in front of the John Deere Museum in Moline, Illinois. In total, 137 participants paid between \$1,500 to \$7,000 each, depending on entry category, for a chance at the total purse of \$150,000 (USD). Hadskey, the team's navigator, and Pike, the driver, competed in the Grand Champion category for the event's \$50,000 grand prize. It was the 15th time they had entered the rally since their first entry in 1994.

Counting drivers, navigators, support teams, race officials and event workers, The Great Race amounts to a travelling car show of up to 800 people moving across the country. For each town along the route, it's often a chance for celebration with spectators coming from the surrounding area for the chance to see automotive history in motion.

"With more than 100 cars in the race, it can take up to two hours for all of the cars to arrive in a town. When we arrive there's often a marching band or a pep squad to greet you and, of course, lots of other old car and motorcycle guys and people who just like old cars." Part of MacDon's sponsorship this year was to provide Hadskey and Pike with some commemorative postcards featuring their '16 Hudson.

"We've changed motors, transmissions, rear ends, springs, brakes – you name it – in the parking lot of a hotel on multiple occasions."

"We would hand them out to the crowds every day at lunch and every night. A lot of people wanted us to autograph them. It's kind of what you do."

As fun and exciting as the race is, Hadskey says that the routine of each day on the road can be grueling.

"Each day really starts the night before when we do maintenance on the car and receive our start time for the next day. We usually start in the morning around 7AM and spend about 10 to 12 hours on the road. When we arrive in a town we'll spend time visiting with the many people who have come out to see the cars. It doesn't leave a lot of time for bar room activities and, generally you are just so beat from doing 300 to 450 miles travelling that you just want to go to bed."

"There's been times when we've been in rain, sleet, hail and snow all in the same day. When it's raining, every inch of you gets wet; there's no way to keep it out."

To help them, Hadskey and Pike typically have a support crew of one or two people who will drive ahead to check them into the next night's hotel, as well as transport the team's trailer of supplies and spare parts.

"We've changed motors, transmissions, rear ends, springs, brakes – you name it– in the parking lot of a hotel on multiple occasions. Fortunately, this year the old car is seasoned enough that all we had to do was put in a couple of quarts of oil and a couple of quarts of water to keep her going."

That's pretty remarkable for a vehicle that celebrated it's 100th birthday this year. Hadskey says that their right hand drive 1916 Hudson, which his partner Pike purchased in Melbourne, Australia, is his favorite of the three vehicles they have entered in the race over the years; the other two being a '24 Hudson and a '32 Ford.

"I just love the open wheel, open cockpit style of car. Our car is an exact replica of a car that raced in Indianapolis in 1916, even though this one did it's racing in Australia. Much of the car is original, but we have made enhancements to it such as adding a fan on the cooling system, an alternator, four wheel hydraulic brakes and an overdrive on the transmission to make it go faster."

But as much fun as it is to drive the '16 Hudson, driving in an open cockpit car can be downright uncomfortable if the weather isn't cooperating.

"There's been times when we've been in rain, sleet, hail and snow all in the same day. When it's raining, every inch of you gets wet; there's no way to keep it out."

Hadskey says that having the right partner is essential in overcoming such discomforts and challenges.

"I put a lot of internal pressure on myself navigating, but my driver is a very calm individual. We get along famously well and don't put pressure on each other. When we have a bad score it is a team score – not my fault or his."

Spending a lot of time on the road is something Hadskey is quite used to. As part owner of Shortline Sales in Memphis, Tennessee, he distributes MacDon equipment to dealers all across the American Southeast.

"We basically cover the confederate states, everything south of the Mason Dixon Line. It's a diverse territory."

The business was started by his uncle Glen Hadskey in 1969, with Bobby joining the company in 1976. Today the business is run by four Hadskeys, all first cousins who have played an important role in bringing MacDon equipment to the American Southeast. Hadskey says that racing a MacDon sponsored vehicle in this year's Great Race had personal importance to him.

"We love the MacDon product. We love the MacDon people. So I knew that finishing with a MacDon sponsored car would be something very special for me. But it was something that I tried not to even think about because I didn't need the added pressure."

And it was a good thing that Hadskey was able to keep that pressure at bay because, when he and Pike finally reached Moline to claim the \$50,000 grand prize this year, it would prove to be by the slimmest of margins. After 2,600 miles (4184 km), only a second separated them from the second place team, the other '16 Hudson in the race driven by their friends Reeder and Stone.

"I would not have wanted to lose like that, but they were good sports. Still, that one second cost them \$40,000."

With this year's victory, Hadskey says that he and Pike plan to retire from the competition for a few years, at least until The Great Race runs a route that looks like it would be too fun to miss.

"Like my uncle Glen used to say, 'when you beat the best pool player in town by accident, you dang sure don't want to play him again.'" **M**





Hadskey (left) and Pike (right) at the 2016 Farm Progress Show in Boone, IA



Classroom in the field

Agriculture in the Classroom is helping reconnect Manitoba's youth with agriculture.



Every September, just around the time the leaves start to change, hundreds of Winnipeg children are plucked from the comfortable warmth of their classrooms, and loaded onto busses for a short journey to one of two research farms south of the city. For most of the kids it will be the first time they've been anywhere near a farm.

Over the next several hours they will find themselves immersed in more than a dozen hands-on activities that will bring them up close and personal with agriculture. They will crush canola to make oil, grind wheat to make flour, see cows, pigs and chickens, learn about bees and discover the connections between health and nutrition. It's all part of The Amazing Agriculture Adventure put on by Agriculture in the Classroom - Manitoba (AITC-M).

"One of our most popular activities is our farm business station where the kids can try their hand at a number of jobs in agriculture," said Sue Clayton, AITC-M Executive Director. "They can pretend to be a farmer, an equipment dealer, an inputs supplier or even a banker. They get to understand the costs of farming and the impact of a great crop or a poor crop on their business. The kids just love this. It really opens their eyes because they are learning all of this on a working farm."

Clayton says that experiences like this have become essential at a time when cities are getting ever larger and rural areas continue to depopulate.

"Forty or fifty years ago the majority of people had some connection to a farm," said Clayton. "Either they farmed, or they had a family member who farmed, so most people understood the business of farming and how their food was grown. But today, most people live in an urban environment and that connection has been lost. Programs like the Amazing Agriculture Adventure are helpful for re-establishing that connection."

"They get to understand the costs of farming and the impact of a great crop or a poor crop on their business."

The Amazing Agriculture Adventure is just one of AITC-M's ongoing initiatives to introduce students to the importance of agriculture in their lives. The not-for-profit charitable organization works with agricultural industry partners to supply educators across the province with curriculum linked resources and programing designed to help teachers easily add agricultural elements to their lessons.

"Teachers are busy. They don't have the time to figure out how to incorporate agriculture into their curriculum, but that's where we come in. We provide detailed curriculum connections in our programs to show teachers exactly what curriculum outcomes they meet. This makes it easy for them to integrate agriculture into their classwork."



Students participate in the 2016 Amazing Agriculture Adventure at Kelburn Farm in Howden, MB



“Many teachers tell us that it is the best field trip that they have brought their classes on. They tell us their kids can’t stop talking about it on the way back to school and that they’ll reference the experience months later in the classroom.”

Last year alone, AITC-M programs reached over 30,000 Manitoba students in grades one through 12, representing one in six students in the province.

“AITC-M’s goal is to have numerous agricultural touchpoints throughout a student’s education. It is the middle years and in high school where we really start putting emphasis on careers in agriculture.”

Clayton, who used to work in recruitment for the University of Manitoba’s Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences, says that career focused programming as provided by AITC-M is critical to address the ongoing labor shortage in agriculture.

“When I worked at the U of M we would say that there are three jobs for every student of ours graduating. While I’m not sure if that statistic has changed, I do know that the demand remains high. In Canada alone, one in eight jobs are connected to agriculture, what most people don’t realize is 90% of those jobs are not farming, but jobs that support the farmer. The agriculture industry needs people who are strong in the sciences, strong in accounting and strong as leaders in business. That’s what drives this industry and the Canadian economy.”

Clayton herself is a testament to the value that exposure to agriculture early in life can have on future career choices. As a city girl, a future in agriculture wasn’t something she had considered until a friend of her father’s gave her some valuable advice when she was just starting to consider career options.

“He was an ophthalmologist, but he said that if he could do it all over again that he would choose agriculture as a career. He said people need to eat and he saw that there was going to be huge social and economic issues regarding food in the future, which was amazing because that was 30 years ago and he had that kind of foresight.”

According to Clayton, programs like the Amazing Agriculture Adventure are having a similar influence on students’ career plans as her father’s


friend had on her. “There are definitely students that have said to us that agriculture wasn’t even on my radar as a career option before this field trip, or until my teacher used one of AITC-M’s resources in their classrooms.”

And for those that may never have a career in agriculture, it’s simply rewarding to be able to see the kids’ faces light up as they go through the program. Many teachers tell us that it is the best field trip that they have brought their classes on. They tell us their kids can’t stop talking about it on the way back to school and that they’ll reference the experience months later in the classroom.”

So popular is the Amazing Agriculture Adventure that it is fully booked months in advance every year and there is always a wait list. To keep programs like this going, Clayton says that AITC-M relies heavily on its many industry partners and volunteers.

“AITC-M absolutely could not do the work that we do without the financial support of our industry partners like MacDon, which for many years has covered the costs of bussing the students to the research farms. Companies like MacDon also help by both encouraging, and making it possible, for their employees to take time off to volunteer and participate in our programs. For the Amazing Agriculture Adventure alone, which we also run in two other locations in Manitoba, we need about 240 volunteers to make it work.”

Clayton says the importance of the work they are doing is witnessed firsthand by the hundreds of volunteers who give their time to AITC-M every year.

“Everybody involved with Agriculture in the Classroom loves and believes in what they do. When you have a child say to you ‘I didn’t know flour came from wheat, I thought it came from dried marshmallows, you know exactly why you are giving up your time to volunteer.” 



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