MacDon

The People · The Passion · The Product

PERFORMANCE

70 from 70

Special 70th Anniversary edition of the people, the passion, and the product.

Grateful For A Life On The Road

For three South African custom harvesters, life on the road provides invaluable experiences that these young farmers wouldn't otherwise get.

Wide-Open Spaces!

Nikita and Michael Austin of New Zealand loves the ability to work in the US with the latest harvesting technology on Jim Deibert's custom cutter team.

Fall 2019 Issue: 27

2020 Calendar Inside!

MacDon The People · The Passion · The Product

PERFORMANCE

Get MacDon Performance Free!
To register for a free subscription to Performance or to remove your name from our mailing list, go to MacDon.com/Performance or call (204) 885-5590.

Contents

MacDonIndustriesLtd | MacDon_Industries_Ltd | @MacDon | MacDonVideos | MacDon Industries

Performance is a Publication of MacDon Industries Ltd.

MacDon Industries Ltd.
680 Moray Street
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R3J 3S3
t. (204) 885 5590 f. (204) 832 7749

MacDon, Inc.
10708 N. Pomona Avenue
Kansas City, Missouri, United States 64153-1924
t. (816) 891 7313 f. (816) 891 7323

MacDon Enterprises, Inc.
Suite 140 - 5315 Wall Street
Madison, Wisconsin, United States 53718
t. (608) 286 1420

MacDon Brasil Agribusiness Ltda.
Rua Grã Nicco, 113, sala 202, B. 02
Mossunguê, Curitiba, Paraná
CEP 81200-200 Brasil
t. +55 41 2101 1713 f. +55 41 2101 1699

MacDon Australia Pty. Ltd.
A.C.N. 079 393 721
P.O. Box 103 Somerton, Victoria, Australia 3062
54 National Boulevard, Campbellfield, Victoria, Australia 3061
t. +61 3 8301 1911 f. +61 3 8301 1912

MacDon Europe GmbH
Edisonstrasse 63
12459 Berlin
Germany
t. +49 30 408 172 839

LLC MacDon Russia Ltd.
123317 Moscow, Russia
10 Presnenskaya nab, Block C
Floor 5, Office No. 534, Regus Business Centre
t. +7 495 775 6971 f. +7 495 967 7600

MacDon® is a Linamar Company LINAMAR Power to Perform

MacDon

70 FROM 70

70 from 70

70 years of harvesting performance is not a one-person job. Our history is made up of 70 years of People, Passion, and Products which have made MacDon what it is today. Our #70From70 stories highlight just a small portion of this amazing journey.

See them all at **MacDon.com/70-from-70**

What's your MacDon story? Share it on your favorite social channel and hashtag #70from70 to show your part in MacDon's rich storied history!

Jim Deibert

#1 of 70, see Jim's video at MacDon.com/70-from-70

It's a short video from 1989 that belongs in a museum. Custom cutter Jim Deibert is sitting in the middle of a wheatfield, halfway out of the cab of his truck, listing off to MacDon's Tom Fox improvements that he would like made to the company's prototype header.

"Make them so that we don't have daily maintenance that takes longer than it does to combine. Fix that chaincase so that we can move it when we load. Fix the reel so it will slide back further. Give me some bolt-on sections, and give me my zero transition at the back of the sickle, but fix it so that I am not eating them guards on the end."

The video documents one of those transitional moments in the history of agriculture: the point between the waning of an old technology and the birth of something better. In this case, the something better is MacDon's new draper header, a radical concept in 1989 given that drapers had already been exposed as impractical for combining back in the 1940s. But MacDon's prototype was light years ahead of those older canvas drapers, and Deibert could easily see their promise.

Deibert's work with MacDon had started the year before in 1988, when MacDon had asked John Deere if they knew of a custom cutter who could trial a header they were working on.

"John Deere sent them to Bill Gerard and Bill said, 'I know the perfect guy because he's had trouble getting his augers to feed in certain conditions.' We had trouble with our 30' auger heads warping from the sun if we were shut off for a few minutes, so that when you started back up the auger would start scraping. I also remember cutting 20-bushel wheat in Colorado and going only two mph because we couldn't get the wheat to feed smoothly. I was at the point where I wanted a better feeding header, so when MacDon called to ask me to trial their draper, I knew it was something I wanted to try."

Deibert would prove to be the perfect choice for the assignment, not just because his operation cut a lot of wheat every year following the harvest from Texas to North Dakota, but also because he was patient enough to push through the many hiccups that working with experimental equipment usually entails.

"The first MacDon employee I met was Karl Klotzbach, who brought the header down behind this old '74 Chevy. That Chevy was just a clunker of a vehicle, and it was working its guts out to pull this monstrous 36 foot header, at a time when 30 footers were the biggest around. When that thing sat alongside other headers, it looked like a man among boys. It just stood out."

Compared to the R&D standards MacDon currently employs, working with the prototype header that first year had a certain seat-of-your-pants feel about it.

"We had a really hot summer in '88, and we could not keep the oil in the header cool when it got above 100°. When it got like that, we would have to take the header off and put my John Deere header back on. But then Karl went to town and bought a transmission cooler for a pick-up and mounted it on the back of that header. Instantly our heating issues were over."

"I also remember Karl spending a lot of time working on the gearbox. It was full of grimy black grease, and poor Karl would just come out completely black head to toe at the end of the day. We fought it and

fought it, but it wasn't stopping us from running even though we had one problem after another. Everything with that header was a work in progress."

Despite the many challenges, Deibert says that he saw enough that first year to convince him that drapers were the way forward.

"At that time, MacDon didn't think that header was for custom harvesters like me. They wanted it for the Canadian farmer with both a swather and a combine, and their plan with me was just to get hours on the unit. But when I saw the way that thing cut and the way it fed so smoothly and evenly into the combine, I knew right then that it was something that I wanted for my operation."

Convinced, Deibert asked MacDon to build him three 30' headers for the '89 season.

"I guess the biggest mistake I made that first year was not going to 36's right away, but I was scared that I couldn't spread the straw and do a good job for my farmers taking in that much material. Transport was also an issue because we had to load the header endways in the back of a 22' truck."

Deibert solved the transport issue by building a trailer to support the back end of the header. Other issues were solved thanks to the constant presence of Karl Klotzbach and Roger Patterson, two MacDon engineers who had been assigned to work with Deibert to iron out the kinks on a header concept that was still largely unproven. It was the start of a close working relationship between the company and Deibert.

"Now today you would never do this, but I remember Roger Patterson laying on the top of my combine, his toes hooked back in the bin so that he could look down and watch the feed from above. The feed auger was really a challenge at that time; they didn't have fingers on the early ones, and I imagine we had ten or more auger designs trying to find the right one that would work."

In addition to Klotzbach and Patterson, many other MacDon employees would spend time with Deibert over the next several years on his harvest runs.

"We had people like Gary and Scott MacDonald, Gene Fraser, Karl Brooks, and Tom Fox spend time with us, plus so many others I can't remember. Many of them were young and pretty fresh on the job at the time, but they helped us a lot. In fact, a lot of these guys who are now senior people at MacDon were introduced to the harvest business back then with that header."

One person Deibert would form a lasting friendship with would be Gary MacDonald, the company's former vice-president.

"Gary has always been very special to me. We used to call each other up and have conversations through the winter. We would just talk and talk. I remember telling him, among others at MacDon, that the guy who could figure out a header that could cut both grains and beans is going to have the market."

Today, as an inductee in the US Custom Harvesters Hall of Fame who now has 50 harvests behind him, Deibert says that one thing that he takes particular satisfaction in from his long career is the part he played in the development of draper header technology.

> **"When I saw the way that thing cut, and the way it fed so smoothly and evenly into the combine, I knew right then that it was something that I wanted for my operation."**

"I don't like to beat my own drum, but we did help contribute to how we cut wheat. We went from using auger platforms to drapers, and that just transformed harvesting. Now when you see the major manufacturers also building drapers, it just shows the confidence they have in the draper concept. It's been fun to watch the product evolve and work with MacDon through the years. They have always been good to work with, and they always send quality people; the kind of people you like to have around."

"One of the kids that rents my land calls me the geekiest over 60 guy he knows," says Alberta farmer Don Boles who 'semi-retired' four years ago, keeping his combine to cut for the people he rents to.

Boles' farm, located near the town of Three Hills about an hour and a half drive northeast of Calgary, has been a host for ongoing MacDon product testing since the early 90s.

"It was me who reached out first to MacDon about the testing. I've hardly ever owned a major piece of equipment that I didn't become involved upstream with the company in some way or another, either in research and development or trying out parts and stuff. Over the years, I've worked with New Holland, John Deere, and CLAAS."

Today, Boles still trials new products for CLAAS and MacDon, all part of his need to be at the forefront of agricultural technology.

"If it wasn't for being able to test equipment, I'd probably quit altogether. It wouldn't be interesting anymore. It's that opportunity to be at the bleeding edge that keeps me going."

Boles defines the bleeding edge as a product still in the R&D phase, about three to five years before it hits the market when it becomes cutting edge.

"I think that I am a pretty decent tester of equipment because I pay attention to detail. If something is junk, I will say it's junk. I mean, if you are just going to have them bring out a product just so you can have free use of it, and then blow smoke at them and tell them how good it is, you are not being much use to anyone. My ultimate interest is in building better equipment for everybody."

While Boles doesn't test equipment for MacDon every year, since 2005, he estimates that he has had MacDon prototypes on his farm at least every other year. That frequency has allowed him to get to know many MacDon employees quite well.

"MacDon has been much more involved to work with than other companies that I have tested for. Because it is smaller, it has much more of a family feel about it, and you get to know some of their people very well. I've become friends with a lot of them, especially Richard Kirkby, who has probably spent 150 nights in Three Hills over the last ten years. Good thing he likes the Best Western there."

Boles says that he has always been impressed by the quality of MacDon personnel sent to his farm.

"It's almost like MacDon gives their people some kind of PR course on how to deal with the public, or they just are very good at picking people that get along with others. That's a huge plus when you are testing equipment because if you are not getting along with people, you are not going to communicate well or get the honest feedback that you need."

While the enormous benefit of farmers like Boles to MacDon is self-evident, Boles is adamant that the value flows two ways.

"It's something that Richard and I have talked a lot about over the years - that it's important there be a two-way street between them and me; they get something from me, but I also get something from them. For me, it's great to have a guy around who is directly involved with building the machine I'm testing; you get to learn stuff you had no idea about, stuff

"MacDon has been making draper headers for combines for 30 years, and everybody is still having trouble catching up to them."

that's not in the owner's manual. You can then employ what you learned so that you are taking full advantage of your equipment, and that can be a big benefit to your operation."

As important as getting the most from his equipment is to Boles, he also admits to another benefit he gets from testing; the little jolt of pride he feels seeing some of his ideas show up in the final product.

"Many of my suggestions have been used, and I think that is why they have enjoyed working with me. One idea of mine that showed up was the height gauge on the D Series Header. I was told that they called it the Don Boles height gauge internally."

One thing that has impressed Boles about MacDon is how relentless the company has been in pushing forward draper header technology for combines, something that has been of benefit to agriculture in general.

"Changing to straight cutting cereals was a mindset change for all of us. We could have been doing it earlier, but before MacDon introduced that draper it wasn't always feasible. The auger headers back then were a real pain to work with, and I remember a neighbor of mine saying in '89 after he had just bought a new combine with an auger header 'it's the best 30 foot bulldozer I've ever bought.'"

Now Boles just shakes his head at anyone who doesn't run a MacDon draper on their combine.

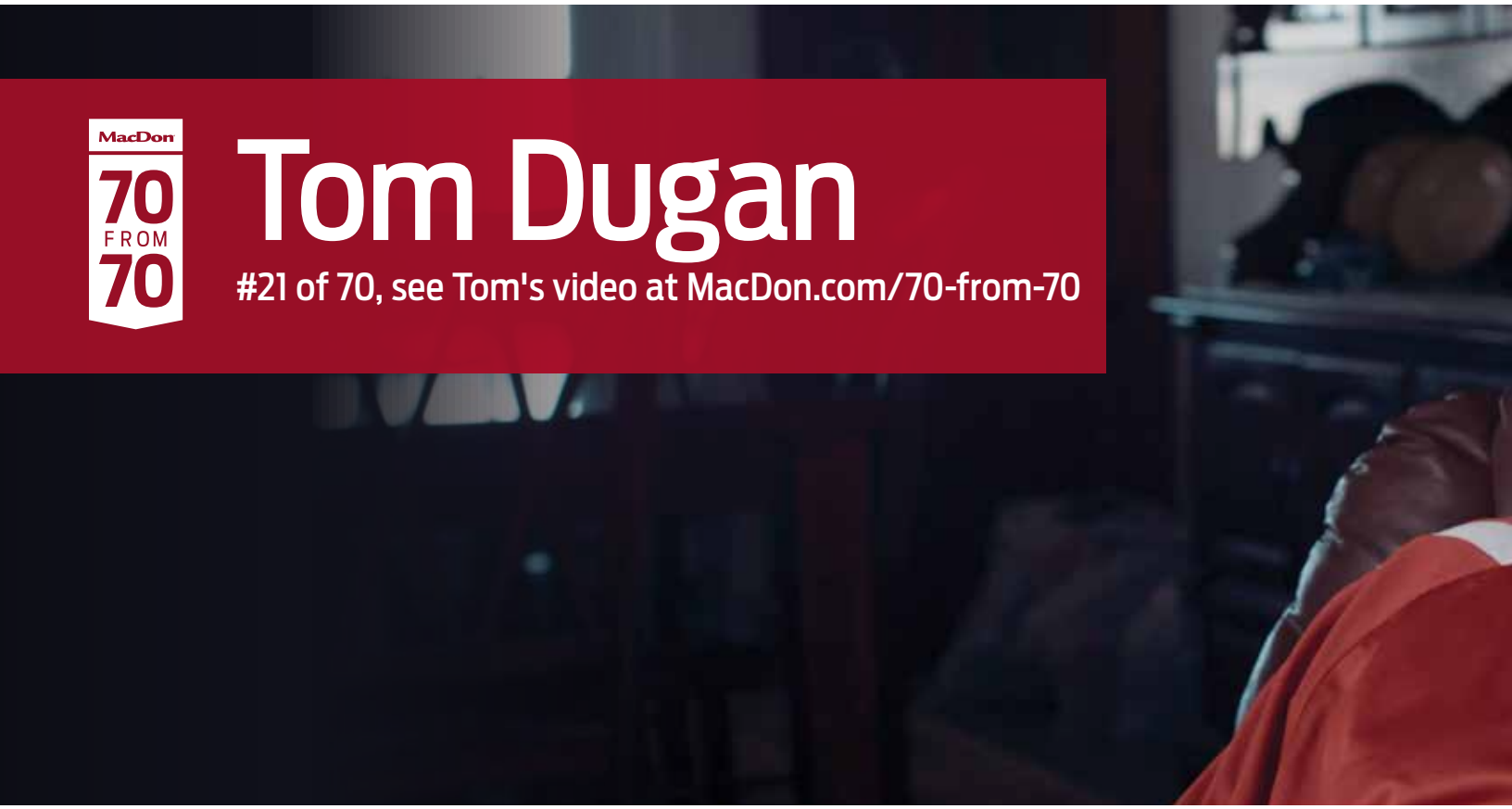
"A lot of my friends did go to other headers, and it has been really funny to watch them come back to MacDon headers. It's actually been gratifying to be able to say to them, 'I stuck with it guys, I told you.' After all, MacDon has been making draper headers for combines for 30 years, and it shows. They have just mastered the art way better than anyone else, and everybody is still having trouble catching up to them."

According to Boles, the reason for that leadership position is the extended amount of time MacDon spends working with and listening to, farmers like him.

"From what I have observed, I would have no reservations saying that MacDon invests more in R&D than most other ag manufacturers. For the size of the company that they are, they spend more time testing their equipment with farmers than the bigger companies. Plus, they have surrounded themselves with really good engineers and R&D people to develop the product. No question, they put more effort into R&D than other companies."

It's a mindset that someone like Boles, who is always looking for the next best thing, can appreciate.

"No matter how good you think something is, you can always improve it."



Tom Dugan

#21 of 70, see Tom's video at MacDon.com/70-from-70

The last time we checked in with Tom Dugan of T&K Red River Dairy [Big Cheese, Performance Magazine, Spring 2012], the large Arizona dairy was milking 9,600 cows daily, representing more than 1,000,000 lbs. of milk off to market every 24 hours. The impressive size of the operation led to Dugan being featured on the cover of Performance standing in one of T&K's barns with the words "Big Cheese" next to him. Unfortunately, the playful headline had unintended consequences for Dugan, who says that he was raised by his parents to be low key and modest about the family's accomplishments.

"My parents are very much against any publicity, and then I'm on the cover, and it says Big Cheese across the front of it. I thought I was going to die," recalls Dugan. "Since then, my nickname with my kids is Big Cheese. I mean, even the employees will call me Big Cheese when I come up."

Not reported in the article at the time was the special relationship that MacDon has enjoyed with the Dugan family, who have generously made their alfalfa fields available to MacDon for product testing for almost two decades. The dairy, located less than an hour's drive south of Phoenix, is perfect for this purpose thanks to its high feed requirements. Because each cow consumes about 110 lbs. of fresh and dry feed daily, T&K must cut large volumes of alfalfa each day, every day, without interruption, year round.

"We've been used to test MacDon equipment quite a bit just because of the non-stop cutting we do. I can remember early on one MacDon tech coming down here and thinking that it was totally messed up that you could be cutting hay in December and listening to Christmas music on the radio. But that's our life in Arizona."

The high cutting demands of the operation translates into a lot of hours placed on T&K's fleet of MacDon windrowers; between 1,500 and 1,800 hours every year for each machine.

"We have some machines that have exceeded 7,000 hours and are still working."

Not coincidentally, that kind of durability is in large part due to the many findings MacDon has made proving their equipment on Dugan's land.

"MacDon also likes to test their machines here because we have very high silt content in our ground, meaning that we wear things out faster than a lot of other operations. In fact, a lot of the improvements that they made on their draper heads were the result of the testing that they did here cutting in our abrasive alfalfa."

Since the 2012 story, the dairy has grown to 450 employees and a herd of approximately 13,000 cows, over 50 times the national herd average of 234 cows.

"In terms of size, we don't measure ourselves; there's always someone bigger. The farm right next to us has to be milking about the same as us. There are plenty of big operations out here."

Beyond ongoing product testing, the Dugans has also played host to a few special MacDon events over the years, designed to allow MacDon dealers to invite their customers to Arizona to trial MacDon's latest equipment in Dugan's fields. The largest of these was MacDon's Phoenix Adventure in 2002, which saw MacDon personnel from across North America make themselves home at T&K for an extended period.

"Seeing the Winnipeg operation was very nice. It just gave me another understanding of how technological advancements happen at MacDon. They are a company that is always on the cutting edge of what they do."

"They continue to get ideas from somewhere, and they are always putting new things together. I mean, who would have thought about driving a swather backward? And you come to find out that the idea was from the 60s or 70s when they had done some experimental stuff. But then they dug it back up and made it come to life."

Going forward, Dugan says that he is more than happy to let MacDon continue to use his alfalfa fields for product development and dealer events, even though it sometimes means that the quality of the cutting may not be up to T&K's usual standards.

"Some would say look at all of the feed that they cut for you, but if you have ever watched people who do not know how to drive swathers cut hay, it's like watching salmon swimming upstream; not very pretty. But I always tell MacDon that the amount of hay that you can mess up is at most a day's worth for us. If there is a problem, we just pick it up and deal with it."

"The real reason we let them do it is more about the family thing, I guess. Even MacDon always asks, 'what are you going to charge us to use your land?' I've never charged for anything they have ever done. I do it because it is just so much fun to have them around. They have always made it enjoyable and made us feel part of the MacDon family."

"We ran two sessions a week, and I think that they ran six or eight sessions in total," recollects Dugan. "I know that it was more than a month because, after a month, MacDon would fly in the wives of their employees working here."

The gesture spoke volumes about the company to Dugan.

"The one thing that I was most amazed by was how MacDon took care of their people. They took care of the wives, not just the employees. Overall, I remember just being impressed by how happy every MacDon employee was working for MacDon. I didn't see employees in our own company being that happy, and it just told me a lot about MacDon."

Dugan says that a side benefit to playing host to events like the Phoenix Adventure, plus the frequent product testing, is many close friendships that he has formed with MacDon people over the years.

"It is a close relationship we have with MacDon. I became very good friends with Gene Fraser (MacDon, Vice President, Global Sales & Marketing) and would talk to him a couple of times a year. I also frequently got to see Gary and Scott MacDonald coming down to look at what was going on with the test equipment, things like that. The MacDonald brothers are very down to earth, and I always felt that I could have called any of them. You may not have gotten them immediately, but you would have got a call back."

In 2012, around the time of the publishing of his story in Performance, Dugan says that he and his family were able to visit MacDon's plant in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and what he saw only added to his favorable impression of the company.

"They continue to get ideas from somewhere, and they are always putting new things together. I mean, who would have thought about driving a swather backward?"

The drought of 1988 reaped heartbreak across the Canadian Prairies. In many places, yields were cut in half, and some farmers were left with nothing to harvest at all. By the end of the year, total crop losses would top $4 billion, and one out of every ten producers would find themselves out of agriculture altogether.

In central Saskatchewan near the town of Govan, Ron Hanmer and his dad had their backs to the wall trying to find a way to cut a crop too light to harvest using their usual methods.

"It was a desperate crop. I don't think any of our wheat was the height of my knee," recalls Hanmer. "Everybody was scrambling to figure out how to cut the crop that was facing them. Swathing was an option, but a poor one because unless you double swathed everything you would never pick it back up."

But then a drop of hope fell to the Hanmers when they saw MacDon's prototype combine draper header at a farm show.

"When we first saw it, it was kind of a eureka moment for us. My dad recognized it as similar to the canvas headers on Massey combines back in the early 50s. Because it didn't use a table auger, you could scalp the crop right close to the ground, and you could get the reel to the knife, all the things you need to do in an extremely short crop. We knew that it was exactly what we needed."

Unfortunately, the header was a unicorn and not for sale to just anyone.

"I was told at the time that MacDon only wanted the header sold to a farmer that would not beat it to death. Luckily, the salesman for Raymore Power and Equipment, Dickson Linklater, had some type of a connection with Gary MacDonald and was able to convince him that we were the right people. Obviously, that header was a huge leap of faith for everybody, I mean if we had wrecked that thing and reported that it was no good that might have ended the whole combine program for MacDon."

But the header proved more than up to the job.

"That header performed absolutely flawlessly for us. We cut our whole crop with it, and I honestly don't remember one problem. I had no issue reporting that the header worked great."

Looking back, Hanmer still marvels at how well built that first MacDon header was.

"I can remember telling the dealer at the time that I wanted him to put on the same guards that were on my swather. But then MacDon got back to me and said, 'no you don't; you want exactly what's on it. We've got the finest guards and sickles made in Germany that money can buy.' And they were right because I don't think that we broke even one sickle that first year."

"Also, the knife drive on that header was almost indestructible. We finally changed the oil in the gearboxes after year three, and that's about all the maintenance we needed for the knife drive. MacDon had done their research pretty darn good. They hadn't come out with something that they had just thrown together; they knew what they were doing."

Beyond using that first header to cut his grain, Hanmer may also have been the first to use a MacDon draper in lentils.

"We had a barn burner of a lentil crop in around 1990, and I ended up buying a flex head for our second combine to cut it. Well, I was cutting those lentils with that flex head, and it was doing pretty decent, but then one of my hired men asked if he could try the MacDon draper in those lentils. Now, remember, that was a rigid header, not a flex header, but it was an eye-opener just how well he cut lentils with that draper."

"Around that time, I also remember having a really heavy crop of durum wheat. My flex head was a 25 foot, and my MacDon draper was a 36 foot, but in that durum, we were running much faster with the MacDon even though we were cutting 11 feet more with each pass, just because it fed so much better. Seeing that, I remember thinking 'why do we have this flex head again?'"

"Everything else that has come after has been a follower, and the only reason they are there is because MacDon showed them the way in the first place."

The Hanmers ran that first MacDon draper for six years without any major issues, before trading it in for a new one.

"I honestly don't remember who I sold it to, but the guy who bought it is probably still running it."

For Hanmer, the header was a favorable introduction to MacDon's commitment to producing a quality product, only reinforced by other experiences with the company over the years.

"A number of years ago, I was fortunate enough to go to a promotional day at John Deere's factory in Waterloo, Ontario. There they were eager to show us the newest, state of the art laser that they were using to measure their shafts without touching them. So about a month later, I found myself at the MacDon factory in Winnipeg, and you know what they had in there? They had the exact same machine that John Deere was so proud of, and I think that MacDon may have even had their machine first."

"That just told me a lot about MacDon. Here was a little company that may have been back shelf to John Deere in terms of size, but they had the same high-tech equipment. That showed me that these guys were really trying; they're really trying to make it work."

Since those early days, Hanmer has been loyal to MacDon drapers with the exception of a short dalliance with a competitive brand draper back in the early 2000s.

"I remember two of my men, both good operators, fixing sickles on those other headers two or three times a day. At the time, I hadn't broken a sickle in days with my MacDons, and I remember asking myself 'what's not right with this picture?'"

Experiences like that have only reinforced Hanmer's impression that MacDon is a company that goes the extra mile to do things right.

"It's clear to me that MacDon puts more effort into their R&D than other manufacturers."

Today, Hanmer's operation, which has grown to eight combines, 20 employees and about 34,000 acres to make it one of the largest in the area, continues to rely on MacDon drapers for its success. He says that he remains appreciative that MacDon had the vision to pursue the draper concept, both for his operation and for agriculture in general.

"Without that first straight cut header from MacDon, it would have taken some time before someone else came along with an equally effective idea, and who knows where we would be now. Everything else that has come after has been a follower, and the only reason they are there is because MacDon showed them the way in the first place."

Tyler Burns

It's the summer of 2012, and Kandahar, Saskatchewan farmer Dustin Burns is in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. He, along with a handful of other producers, is a dinner guest of former MacDon owner Gary MacDonald, who has turned the evening's conversation to one of his favorite topics.

"Gary went around the table and wanted to hear from everybody in the group, not just those willing to speak up," recalls Burns of the evening. "It was really important to him to understand how we used MacDon's equipment, how it affected our lives, our businesses, and our families."

Dustin's invitation to Winnipeg had come following a story in Performance Magazine (Resurrection, Spring 2011) telling of how MacDon FlexDrapers had saved the family's oat harvest from an early snow the previous autumn. Now he, and the rest of Gary's dinner guests, have found themselves part of an informal focus group whose purpose was to provide input on MacDon's next generation of products.

"The visit included a plant tour and a group session where they were looking for feedback on all of their products, but mostly their swather. They wanted to know if we would continue to be OK with paying for a product that warranted a premium price, a product that is a step above the competition."

Dustin – who owns Windy Poplars Farm, a 20,000 acre mixed crop operation along with his brother Tyler, father John, and good friend Doug Reeve – says that MacDon most wanted to hear about their farm's needs harvesting canola.

"One of our biggest challenges at the time was the recent increase in canola yields, which had resulted in a bulkier mass of material for the swather to deal with. I told them that we needed more capacity, both on the deck and through the throat of the swather. I'm sure that we weren't the only ones with that feedback because I think that became a major focus on their development of the new swather."

MacDon clearly appreciated the input, because the year after the visit Dustin was approached about testing a prototype windrower at Windy Poplars. It was the start of another important MacDon R&D / Farmer relationship, one that would provide Dustin and his partners with a cab seat view, so to speak, of MacDon's product development process.

"All four of us enjoy testing equipment, but Doug and I share a special enthusiasm because we both have ag engineering backgrounds and have been involved in the manufacturing process directly. We do it largely because we feel it is valuable to have partnerships in the industry, but also

MacDon 70 FROM 70

Dustin & Tyler Burns

#41 of 70, see their video at MacDon.com/70-from-70

because it gives us the opportunity to provide feedback that can affect the final product and benefit other farmers. We do like to affect the outcome, even if it is a little thing."

Dustin recalls that the first summer testing MacDon's prototype windrower, which would eventually become today's M1 Series, wasn't without its hiccups.

"The swather they brought out was by no means a finished product, so they didn't want a potential customer operating it. Instead, they provided two operators, both summer students I think, so not the most experienced. As such, the swather was not set up the way we would do it for our land and conditions, and in all honesty, it didn't do a very good job."

"After that first year, we provided feedback on what the unit was missing to manage our conditions. We also communicated how we would like the testing done, that we would prefer to operate the prototype ourselves, just because we know our land and how we like to tackle our fields."

What most impressed Dustin about MacDon after that first year was not just that MacDon accommodated their concerns, but how much the company had learned.

"They were well prepared for that next season. They clearly wanted to make sure that they learned from that scenario so that the next time was a positive experience for us. In fact, the machine they brought out the next year was really not that far from where they landed with the final product."

"Overall we ran a prototype for at least three seasons prior to its release, at various stages of development. We were impressed with the support that came with it; that they listened to how we wanted to see it operated instead of pushing on us how they wanted it done."

Tyler Burns, who spent the most time of the farm's four owners operating the prototype windrowers, says that he was really struck by the commitment of the technicians that MacDon supplied to provide them with support.

"I remember one season they were really focused on the decibel level in the cab," recalls Tyler. "We were out cutting in wet conditions with lots of mosquitos and bugs in the field. They had this guy stand out there on the swaths just so they could measure the noise each time the swather passed. We were doing that for at least an hour, so he must have been eaten alive. That's pretty dedicated. I don't know if I would do that."

"That just shows the attention to detail that MacDon has," adds Tyler. "Sometimes, when you see how the sausage is made, you think twice about buying the product, but after being that involved testing that machine I knew that it was what I wanted to run."

Today Windy Poplars owns a single M1170 windrower, which they rely on to do most of their swathing, along with an older M155 which they keep in reserve as a backup.

"We have run our M1170 for two harvests now," says Tyler. "It has been almost flawless for us. There haven't been any issues or surprises."

And the fact that there haven't been any issues is not any great revelation to anyone at Windy Poplars, especially Dustin, who points to the extended development time that MacDon invested in the product as the primary reason it has performed so well.

> **"Some other manufacturers would have considered it market ready two years earlier, but not MacDon; they wanted to make sure that everything was right before they released it."**

"A lot of shortline manufacturers get caught trying to release into the market before the product is fully ready," says Dustin. "The last two years that we were testing that machine not much changed on the unit, only a few small details. Some other manufacturers would have considered it market ready two years earlier, but not MacDon; they wanted to make sure that everything was right before they released it. And because of that, it just works."

In addition to helping with the development of M1 Series windrowers, Windy Poplars has also assisted with the fine-tuning of the FM100 (float module) on MacDon's new FD1 FlexDraper header. Dustin says that both experiences have added to his appreciation of MacDon as a company.

"MacDon has been excellent to work with," says Dustin. I have nothing bad to report; even that first year, when things were rocky, they were really good to us. And that comment filters right down to the technicians that were out here day to day with us. Either they pick the right people or instill in them the right ideals; regardless, they have just been excellent to be around."

Beyond enjoying the working experience with MacDon, Dustin says that he also takes more than a little satisfaction knowing the role Windy Poplars has played in developing products like the M1 Series.


Dustin Burns

"I hope that our feedback is valuable to them. We would never want to take credit for any specific idea, even though we may see one or two of them reflected in the machine when it is released. As an engineer, I know that they always have lots of different things that they are trying when they are developing something, and they probably have gone through 20 different iterations of something before we see it. That said, it is our feedback, positive or negative, that determines the direction that they go with the end product, so it's always nice to know that you have had a positive influence."

Future ag historians seeking to chronicle the FlexDraper revolution can be forgiven if they begin with the launch of MacDon's 974 FlexDraper in 2003. But the story really starts more than a decade earlier with the frustrations of Bruce Nelson, and his constant badgering of MacDon to develop a draper header that could harvest his soybeans.

Nelson, a former custom cutter who currently farms about 7,500 acres near Clark, South Dakota, says he remembers back in the early 90s, how much he detested cutting soybeans with the flex auger platforms that were available at the time.

"We were just massacring fields and wasting a lot of crop. From extensive auger shelling and our inability to cut cleanly, to beans always falling off the cutterbar, our equipment back then was just awful."

But then Nelson had a stroke of inspiration; why not try his MacDon draper header that he used for wheat in his soybeans? His experiment was an instant success - all of the cutting, shelling, and feeding issues that were common with his regular flex auger platform disappeared. The only problem was he couldn't keep the header out of the dirt. If only MacDon could build a draper capable of following the contours of his ground, his soybean harvesting problems would be solved.

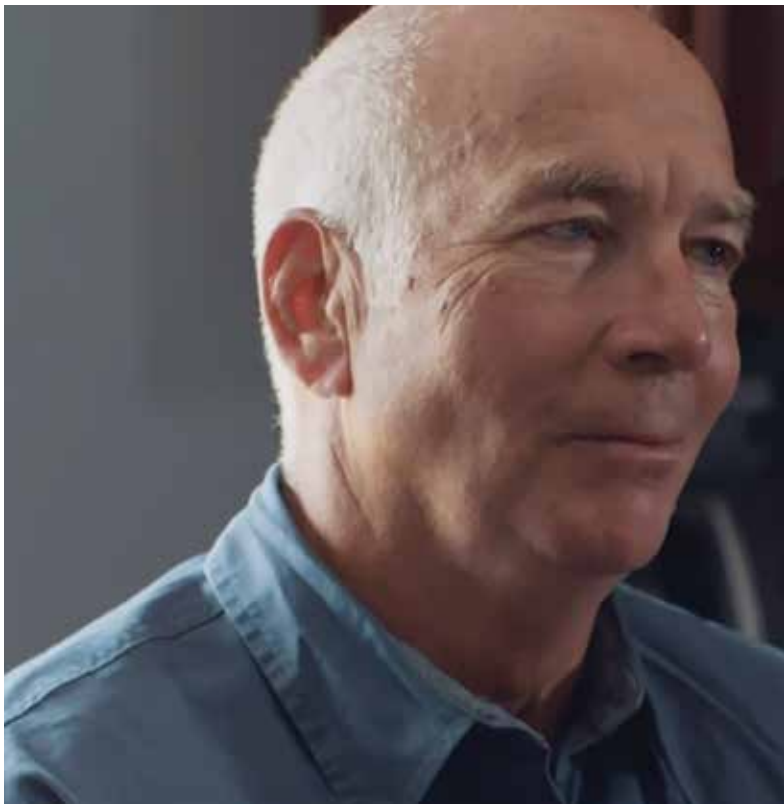
Thus started Nelson's one-person campaign to convince MacDon to develop such a product.

"Back in the mid-90s, Gary MacDonald and others from MacDon would make a trip every summer down to the wheat harvest in Kansas. They would stop into the field to see how we were doing, and I would always tell them, 'guys we need to make these things cut beans.' I would also bring the topic up every time I saw them at harvest conventions or anywhere else. I just kept pestering them."

The first hint that Nelson's nagging was beginning to pay off happened when Karl Klotzbach showed up on his farm one fall with MacDon's new 972 Harvest Header.

"At the time, MacDon was pretty sure that the 972 was the be-all-end-all header forever. We put that header on my combine and went to the soybean field, but it was just too heavy; we could not keep it out of the dirt and mud. It became painfully obvious to Karl that it wasn't going to work."

"It's mind-boggling to me what he did. I know the theory behind it, but to this day, I still don't understand how he made it work."



"I think MacDon kind of threw up their hands and didn't think much more of it, but then I started mucking around with my 962s, trying some different things like crop lifters with some success. I even came up with something I called a baby flex sickle that took advantage of the header's existing flotation."

Soon after, Nelson had the chance to share his ideas with MacDon when he was invited up to Winnipeg to talk harvesting with MacDon's engineering staff.

"I'm guessing it was the spring of '97 or '98 that MacDon brought two of my guys and me up to Winnipeg. I can't remember who all was there, Gary MacDonald, Tom Fox, Frank Talbot – it was quite a room full of people. We got up in front of them and talked header problems and stuff, and never really talked about soybeans until the last five minutes. That's when we showed them this cheesy little video we had made showing our existing soybean header and the problems we saw, and the solution that I had come up with."

Nelson says that even though his sickle idea was quickly dismissed because it would never withstand the rigors of a sickle moving back and forth hundreds of times a second, he must have got the company's attention because that fall Tom Fox brought down a production 972 that he had "tweaked on a little bit" to try in his soybeans.

"He had cut the center of the cutterbar loose and made a little fulcrum thing on the adapter to kind of support it. That's where the idea of using the header's weight to support another piece of the header came from."

The tweaked header was still nowhere near the solution, but MacDon had shown that it had listened and was working on the problem.

Bruce Nelson

#51 of 70, see Bruce's video at MacDon.com/70-from-70

"About a year after that Karl Klotzbach calls and said 'we have something coming but can't get there this fall; can you leave us 50 acres of beans to harvest in the spring and we'll buy them from you?'"

"That was the first time I saw the three-piece frame. Frank Talbot had brought the header down, and I thought he was nuts and didn't think that it would work at all. The test was a big deal too because Case was involved, and they had brought one of their combines with their existing flex head. I remember the conditions being extremely horrible. It was muddy, and we were constantly getting stuck, but they saw enough to say we have got something here. That was not the eventual FlexDraper concept, but it was pretty close to it, and that all took place on my farm here."

Over the next several years, Nelson would enjoy a front row seat to the evolution of the FlexDraper concept.

"The first three-piece platform I saw had big coil springs on the side of the header to support the wings. Version two had airbags, then Roger Patterson took Tom Fox's idea of using the mass of the header to support another part of the header and came up with the linkage that we have today."

"It's mind-boggling to me what he did. I know the theory behind it, but to this day, I still don't understand how he made it work. I mean he's got fulcrums and pivot points; it's just extremely impressive and really cool what he came up with. It's a masterpiece of engineering."

Today, Nelson downplays his role in bringing about the FlexDraper and remains convinced that only MacDon could have invented the concept.

"I don't want to take any credit because it was just stubbornness on my part to get MacDon working on the problem. No other OEM was ever going to tackle it because they were either content with what they had, or simply didn't have the vision or the time to pursue it."

"The thing that has been most refreshing through my long history with MacDon is that they have been the only manufacturer to take an active interest in what you were saying. They welcomed input from guys like me and treated you like an equal. That attitude has been unique in my entire career."

For Nelson, MacDon's willingness to listen, as well as its commitment to the kind of extensive R&D that he experienced on his farm, is the secret behind the company's ability to produce products that deliver real value to the farmer.

"From day one I've been impressed by the many little clever ideas MacDon incorporates into their equipment – how they route stuff, how they engineer stuff. But I think the thing that gets lost most in any header discussion is the longevity of their products. These things just run, and they will run a long time without a lot of maintenance and upkeep. They will still be performing the same after 25,000 acres as the first day they were put in the field. That's just good design."

While Nelson remains humble about his part in the FlexDraper story, he says that he appreciates being involved in the development of a product that has already helped a lot of farmers.

"MacDon has been so good to me over the years, and it's just a pleasure to have been part of developing the FlexDraper, and maybe help a little bit. The product has truly revolutionized soybean harvesting, particularly in the way that soybeans and peas have now gone all through the upper Midwest and into Canada. That would never have happened without the FlexDraper. I know that's a pretty strong statement, but I would back that up whole heartedly, because it would have been pretty hard to do with the flex heads we had before MacDon came along."

Tracy & Jim Zeorian

#61 of 70, see their video at MacDon.com/70-from-70

The last time we visited with custom combiners Tracy and Jim Zeorian, they were new additions to the MacDon family, having purchased their first MacDon product only two years previous (Wheatfield Nomads, Performance Magazine, Fall 2013). At the time, the veteran custom combiners were one of the dwindling number of single combine operations working North America's wheat harvest, and among the last on the harvest run to switch to MacDon FlexDrapers. Now, seven years on with all four of their daughters married or in college, the couple are reluctantly beginning to admit that the number of harvests left to them after this, their 37th, are waning.

"I know that the day is drawing near when Jim says OK, I am done with this, and we will have to sell the equipment and retire," said Tracy from the couple's trailer home parked for a job near Jordan, Montana. "Even just hanging out here on a rainy day in Jordan, which is one of my favorite places in the world, I need to step back and soak it all in because when we retire we likely won't make it back here. When it is just a memory, I don't want to look back and say I wish I had appreciated it more."

To help preserve those memories and also share the custom cutting experience with a wider audience, Tracy has been posting for the last several years, videos, and stories on the couple's Facebook page (Zeorian Harvesting & Trucking) and website (nebraskawheatie.com). To her surprise, these postings have gained an avid following from people both in and out of agriculture.

"I sort of decided to tell our story. A daily blog just so people can understand what we do every day, the good and the bad. Not just the highlights," said Tracy, who does most combining, while Jim drives the grain truck and maintains the equipment. "I'm just amazed by how many people love my stories about the custom harvester, and now think that I'm big in the custom harvesting industry, because I really don't see that."

Many of Tracy's videos are shot from the cab of the couple's New Holland combine, providing the viewer a chance to see a MacDon FlexDraper in action.

"What you see ahead of me is the reel of the header running and every now and then I will pan across to show the wheat coming in. You can see how the header cuts it and lays it down perfectly. Maybe I'm a little OCD, but I just love watching it."

For Jim, the decision to move to a FlexDraper remains a positive one for a couple whose livelihood truly depends on keeping their equipment running.

"With some companies in the industry right now, it seems like they don't want to carry parts, or if you have any questions, you can't get definitive answers because you are working with multilevel corporations," says Jim. "But with MacDon, at least I am not too concerned about the thing that hangs on the front of my combine. I know that if I've got a problem, I've got someone I can call for answers and that I can get parts. That's very important."

Both Tracy and Jim believe that the difference in customer service that they've experienced lies in MacDon's culture.

"We know that MacDon is a large worldwide company, yet they've been able to keep that small-town feel to the business," said Tracy. "MacDon's family mentality is absolutely the best part of the whole company."

To illustrate, Jim points to a visit he and Tracy made two years ago to MacDon's headquarters in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

"We had been visiting a combiner friend in Grand Forks, North Dakota, and decided on a whim to jump in his vehicle and drive up to Winnipeg to visit the plant. When we got there, Paul Steiner, who we knew because he used to run the MacDon's Custom Harvest support crew, greeted us and said, 'you're going to come and stay at my house.' The next day we toured the plant, and we met with some engineers who really wanted to hear what we had to say. They even took us to a hockey game. That reception was very unique. We've worked with a lot of companies through the years, and visited a lot of plants, but we have never stayed at anyone's house before."

"The MacDon employees that we deal with – people like Paul, Karl Brooks, Jim Gladstone, and Gene Fraser – have become more than just people we talk to," adds Tracy. "We feel a closeness to them. They have become a part of who we are. They are our friends."

Underscoring how much importance the Zeorians apply to build connections in the industry is HarvestHer.com, another social media project started by Tracy. Started in 2016, the website provides a platform through which women in agriculture can connect and share their stories.

"I was really feeling a need to be part of promoting the custom cutting industry, but I also had this nagging feeling that it had to focus on the industry's women who are often the silent partner in the business," recalls Tracy. "The purpose was to shine a light on what they do and help people to understand that there is more to harvest that just combines, trucks, grain carts, and tractors. There's also food that needs to be fixed, kids that need to be taken care of, groceries that need to be bought, and clothes that need to be washed. You know, all of that behind the scenes stuff that never gets talked about."

To help fund the project, Tracy reached out to several companies for sponsorship, including MacDon.

"I remember going to Jim Gladstone with my idea and asking him if he thought MacDon could help, and he was instantly like 'hey I'm on it.' It's wonderful having friends come through for you when you need them the most."

Today, with dozens of regular contributors and thousands reading their postings, HarvestHer has exceeded Tracy's initial vision attracting women from not just custom cutting but also across the agriculture industry.

"HarvestHer has created a community for these gals to go to, a place where they can talk about things and have somebody understand what they are going through."

The group even hosts an annual retreat for up to 20 women at a house that Tracy rents outside of Omaha, Nebraska.

"We have women coming from Oklahoma to Saskatchewan. Contributions from partners like MacDon have been tremendously helpful in covering some of our costs. The gals can leave home and feel like it will not take an arm and a leg to get there. It's always hard to do things for yourself when you know that the money needs to be for something else."

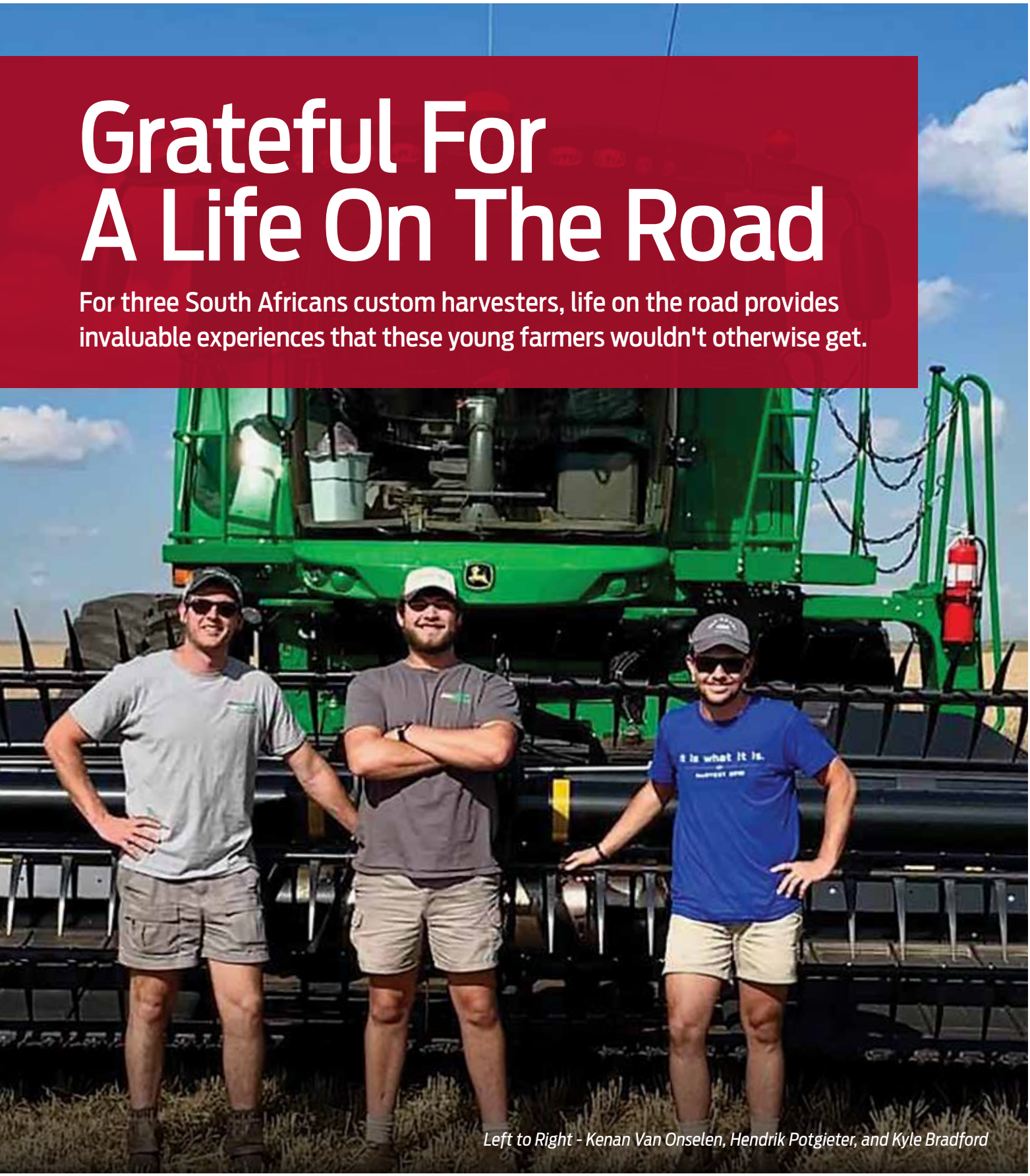
Tracy says that MacDon's support for HarvestHer has only reinforced her and Jim's understanding of what it means to be part of the MacDon family.

"MacDon has a tendency to make us one header people feel as important as those who own 20 MacDon headers. We are just as important to them as they are to us."

> **"I know that if I've got a problem, I've got someone I can call for answers and that I can get parts. That's very important."**

Grateful For A Life On The Road

For three South Africans custom harvesters, life on the road provides invaluable experiences that these young farmers wouldn't otherwise get.



Left to Right - Kenan Van Onselen, Hendrik Potgieter, and Kyle Bradford

A lot of jobs require some travel — but that typically doesn't mean being sent across the world for seven months at a time.

That's the life Kenan van Onselen, Kyle Bradford and Hendrik Potgieter have lived the past few years. They head to North America from their home of South Africa to work the harvest for Braathen Harvesting, a nearly 50-year-old custom harvesting operation that deals mostly in small grains, soybeans, corn, and sunflowers.

This year's season was the third Onselen has spent in North America, while Bradford — who hails from the same city as Onselen (Port Elizabeth) — and Potgieter (whose hometown is in the Bergville area) each now have two under their belts. While some of the magic and big-eyed wonderment that comes along with working in such a new and different environment has worn off, all three young men say when they first arrived, the culture shock was real.

"In the beginning, it's eye-opening... the traveling is nice in the first year, you see new things, you see the infrastructure of America, and how it's built and how it's different from South Africa, so it's an eye-opener then, but in years to come it's just like going home, you get used to it," says Onselen, 24.

"Traveling, not even just for work, sometimes we get time off, and we get to pick up and go somewhere. We loved seeing Mount Rushmore."

And it wasn't just their physical surroundings that offered a stark change; the way business is run, and measurements are calculated proved to be tricky things to get used to. Not to mention, homesickness does take its toll.

"I'd say, and I think the guys would agree, it's working on your systems... we've all got our own ways of doing things, but you always have to fall in line and do it the way you do it (in North America), like the metrics, I think that's a challenge," says Potgieter, 32.

"I think another challenge we would have is lack of communication, with the language barrier, you know? Accents!" says Onselen with a laugh. "But I think we can all agree besides the work, being away from home is quite rough, especially for long periods of time, so that makes it a bit challenging."

Onselen, Bradford, and Potgieter all come from a strong farming background, either through family farms or studying Agriculture at university. Word of mouth is what led each of them to research more about working harvests in North America. Not only would the men gather experience in a new environment with different machinery and sometimes different crops, but it would be a better opportunity to earn a living than staying home.

After their first years following Braathen's harvesting route from Texas along the Red River through to the Kansas/Oklahoma border and into northeast Colorado before going north to South Dakota and North Dakota. While using much more technologically advanced machinery than they have access to back home, including MacDon headers for small grains and soybeans, they knew they'd like to come back again.

Given their similar life paths, goals, and experiences, the men have built a tight bond as they've worked together, and with their other crew members these last few months, a major workplace pro that isn't necessarily a given.

"We're a small crew, so we're quite tight, we all get along, so it's not a big corporation, it's a very personal, one-on-one type of situation," explains Onselen.

"And then on top of that, it's just nice to be able to work with this equipment; we've got it back home but just not on the same scale, you know? So just to work with all this fancy equipment that makes life so much easier in the field is quite nice."

"All the technology does make the work easier, to get to work with this stuff is kind of cool," adds Potgieter.

"And in this case, working with a nice, fancy MacDon!" Bradford, 25, chimes in.

South Africa, while a stunning country and a very popular vacation spot because of the natural beauty and safari tours, has a notably high crime rate. Murder, assaults, break-ins, and other types of violent crimes are prevalent, and increased security measures — such as a rise in gated communities and, for those who can afford it, the use of private security guards — are now common in many parts of the country.

So, while there aren't a lot of things Onselen misses about North America when he heads back home, he does love the level of safety he feels while working there.

"I'm pretty sure everybody can say there's no place like home, but I could actually say one thing, I miss the safety side. Just your personal safety, like you can leave your key in the pick-up, you don't have to lock your camper... that I miss most," says Onselen.

All three men plan on returning to North America for future harvesting seasons; they recognize there are a lot of people who would love the same opportunity, but they aren't ready to give it up quite yet.

> **"All the technology does make the work easier, to get to work with this stuff is kind of cool."**

"I would say yes... I'm not sure about the near future. I think me, personally, I need a bit of a break, but I would definitely say yes. It's such an amazing opportunity to come here and work and earn the money we earn and do what we do. It's certainly worth coming back," says Onselen.

"The opportunity is quite a big thing to get, there's a lot of people back home who don't get the opportunity we get, and we love to be able to do what we do, so we're all lucky in that aspect," says Bradford.

"I would definitely agree," says Potgieter. "You're never too old to learn, and every time we come back, we gain more experience and learn new things, even if you've done it before."

Wide-Open Spaces!

Michael Austin of New Zealand loves the ability to work in the US with the latest harvesting technology on Jim Deibert's custom cutter team.

When combine driver Michael Austin states that his hometown is Te Awamutu, he's well aware you've likely never heard of it before, and even more than that, may not be able to pronounce it, either.

"You want me to spell that?" the 24-year-old asks with a laugh over the phone.

But the small town of just over 10,000 in the Waikato region of the North Island of New Zealand does have some fame. It's known as "The Rose Town of New Zealand" because of the massive rose gardens in the center of town. Plus, it's only a 45-minute drive away from the Hobbiton set used in both The Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit films. And, it's known for its agriculture and farming industry, a profession Austin was born into.

Austin's family owns a custom harvest and chopping business; they go from small farm to small farm, sometimes hitting several in one day, hired by those who don't have the means to have their own equipment. They spray, and cultivate, and plant and, harvest using their own gear, which would otherwise be unavailable to their clients.

The bulk of New Zealand's farming (which is responsible for around two-thirds of the goods exported from the country) focuses on pastoral farming, cattle, sheep, and, especially in Austin's area, dairy. The land dedicated to horticultural crops such as stone fruits, kiwifruit, and avocados, as well as arable crops, is on the rise.

Even still, nothing quite prepared Austin and his wife, Nikita, for the expansiveness of the North American harvest.

The pair is currently working for longtime MacDon customer Jim Deibert, traveling from his home base in Colby, Kansas, to Texas and ultimately up through North Dakota harvesting wheat, before heading back to Texas to start on corn.

"The North American harvest is something that everyone in the agricultural side of things around the world is probably pretty keen on doing, and for me, it was something extremely different to home," said Austin from one of the team's stops in North Dakota this past summer.

"We have two of our own combines, but the scale of what we do is nothing compared to what they do over here, and so it's neat to see. And I always wanted to travel and work overseas, and America seemed like the place for me to go."

This run is Austin's second time in North America working for Deibert. He was just 18 years old the first time he came over in 2014. The experience was unlike anything he had participated in before, he enjoyed it and wanted to go back if and when he had the chance to do so. Being able to bring Nikita, who also has a background in farming, along for the ride, was a bonus.

But the literal and figurative change of scenery didn't come without some growing pains and challenges. Although the crops Austin encounters here are altogether not that different than what he sees in New Zealand (grass silage, maze silage, wheat, barley, canola, corn), the technology and sheer volume of land that needs to be covered were unlike anything he had encountered before and definitely took some getting used to.

"It is very different in that way, that's for sure; I'm just not sure how to explain it really! At home, you might go to three or four different farms a day, whereas over here, you're on one expansive land for quite a while. It's just vast and enormous," Austin said.

Oh, and he had to learn the hard way that in North America, we drive on the right side of the road.

"The truck driving as well, that was a challenge to learn, I'd never driven a truck, and the first thing I did in North America was drive a truck on the wrong side of the road. That was probably the biggest challenge," Austin chuckles. "The driving at home in itself, we've got a lot of holes and small fields and tricky terrain to work with, whereas over here, it's just such big, expansive, amazing spaces."

The access to top-of-the-line machinery, too, was something Austin was unaccustomed to, which he considers not so much a challenge but more of a pleasant surprise that made his time in the field much easier.

As a kid, Austin was allowed to "play" on combines but says his work overseas was the first opportunity he had to run one and be solely responsible for the machine. He adds that his experience has been incredibly positive because of Deibert's commitment to owning the best, safest machinery for the job, which includes six MacDon FD140 FlexDrapers.

"I've been running with Jim, and a lot of gear and equipment they use is really up to the highest of standards. It's new, and they're running at the forefront of technology, whereas a lot of places you see around there's still a lot of old machinery running, and it's cool to see," Austin says of Deibert's fleet.

Austin is getting ready to wrap up his second season. Though he is happy to head back home, he says he's going to miss the ease of working with Deibert's team and the opportunity they give him to relax and fully enjoy the work he's doing.

"It's just really nice for me as a driver; it's quite a low-stress environment. I know for Jim it's not so much, because it's his livelihood on the line, but it's definitely a lot more relaxing driving in these big fields," says Austin. "You can just enjoy what you're doing a lot more without worrying about a whole lot of other things."

"We have two of our own combines, but the scale of what we do is nothing compared to what they do over here."

Left to Right - Nikita and Michael Austin