

Rising food costs

by BRIAN LOCKHART

I don't really know a whole lot about farming other than it's hard work and the population and citizens of this country depend on farmers to feed cities.

Although I did date a farmer's daughter for about a year at one time, so that should count for something, even though she taught me absolutely nothing about plowing a field or raising cattle, I did find out that farm girls are fun to be around with good attitudes, and seem to enjoy staying in shape.

I learned quite a bit about the science of the industry when I worked for a national farming magazine on a freelance basis several years ago.

At the time, I was given all sorts of assignments on a variety of differing farming topics like why a certain herbicide would not kill some kinds of weeds and I covered news on the chicken farming segment and the cattle and pork industries.

Quite often when doing research, I couldn't find an answer. At those times I would call the University of Guelph ? a university renowned for its agricultural programs - and speak to a professor there.

There were two or three professors who I routinely called for help. They were very accommodating, friendly, and very eager to share their knowledge. These professors are experts in their field.

Most of the times when I spoke to them, they had an answer for me on the spot. Either they were already aware of a problem that was taking place in farming, or they had an immediate answer for whatever question I had.

I learned a lot about the science of farming and what it takes to produce a successful crop through those professors. There's a lot more to it than planting seeds and waiting for them to grow.

Every time a plant grows, it takes nutrients from the ground ? that's just basic science. Sooner or later those nutrients will be gone and you won't be able to grow anything.

At one time, a field was left fallow for a season to allow the soil to regenerate. That practice is still done in some countries.

In the west, the loss of nutrients in the soil is countered by applying fertilizer. One farmer told me that if you don't fertilize the land, you won't grow a crop ? at least not the type of crop that makes a farm viable. Your yields will be low, and you'll soon be out of business.

Many Canadian farmers get their fertilizer from Russian sources. There are reasons for this, most notably the fact that Russia has the resources and production facilities to make fertilizer.

While there are notable potash producers in Canada, the other ingredients that go into making fertilizers are not as quite readily available.

As the war in Ukraine rages on, the federal government is creating sanctions to punish Russia for its militaristic endeavours. One of those sanctions is a tariff applied to Russian fertilizers.

The problem is the tariff is levied against Canadian farmers who buy the fertilizer. The Russians aren't being punished, Canadian farmers are the ones paying out an additional 35 per cent for the fertilizer to grow their crop. The idea is that if you apply a tariff

against Canadian farmers, they will be forced to buy products from another market.

To make matters worse, the tariff is being backdated to apply to shipments purchased before that war even started.

No other western countries have applied a tariff to Russian fertilizer.

Sanctions are supposed to punish another country, not your own. By charging Canadian farmers this tariff, you are adding an extra 35 per cent to their bottom line. Guess who's going to be paying that extra when those products start showing up on the grocery store shelves?

Add to that the rising cost of fuel, and you have the makings of some serious price increases when this current crop starts showing up on grocery store shelves.

During the American Civil War, William Tecumseth Sherman's march to the sea demonstrated the best way to defeat an enemy is to destroy the food supply. If you want a population to give up, cut off their food and you'll soon be in control.

However, the idea is to do it to the other guy, not your own people.

Whether Ontario farmers can find an alternate source for the majority of their fertilizers remains to be seen. Local co-ops and the farming associations are already lobbying the government for relief.

Expect to be paying more for that loaf of bread when the new crops start arriving at the mills.