

Empowering young farmers in Manitoba

Today's young farmers are the business leaders that will develop Manitoba's agricultural future. Strengthening the next generation of farmers directly benefits the profitability and sustainability of agriculture in the province.

Gary Smart, business development specialist with Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (MAFRD), says the biggest challenge facing young farmers today is affordability as the costs of machinery and land are rising. The professional consulting and skill development available through *Growing Forward 2's* Growing Competitiveness – Next Generation program makes the transition to farm ownership easier.

Strengthening farmers through transition

An important part of maintaining a strong agricultural sector is ensuring farmers between the ages of 18 and 39 are receiving the knowledge and tools they need to succeed and grow their businesses.

To help young farmers develop their skills, there is funding available for services that enhance business management, including assessment, analysis, financial planning, risk management, marketing and leadership.

"There are funds available for producers to get training that maybe they thought they couldn't afford," says Smart. "Including going to a conference or taking an ag course in an area they'd like more knowledge or expertise."

Chris MacMillan is one farmer who has recently taken advantage of the funding available. Farming

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in Marquette, Manitoba, he's taking over his parents' dairy operation.

"We used the funding to help with the transition of shares and shareholder loans," he says. "The accountants let us know about the program and it saved me personally quite a bit of money and really helped through the process."

Smart says that when young farmers apply through the program they are paired with an advisor and through the process look critically at their plans for the future.

"When they apply they meet with us and we go over a financial assessment and do a backgrounder to see where they're at and where they want to be," says Smart.

Program has lasting impact

Smart has seen the impact of similar programs available under *Growing Forward*.

"I've been involved with families that have been in turmoil and didn't know which direction to take," he says "They were able to meet with a professional consultant to find the right path for their farm.

Now they have a plan and they're starting to implement it."

Barry and Tracy Chappell are one of the farm families who received funding from *Growing Forward* approximately five years ago while they were incorporating their grain farm and crop input business.

"Incorporating is the best thing that ever happened to our organization. Having some funding to help us offset our costs was a huge benefit," says Barry Chappell. He explained the advice they received from MAFRD business development specialists throughout the process was also valuable.

"It wasn't a very difficult process and I don't know if that many people are aware of it," says Barry in regards to applying for the funding.

He explained that families can often find future generational planning difficult, and sometimes can make mistakes.

"Many people have misconceptions around things like incorporating," says Tracy Chappell. "They think you need to be very big, but that's not true. For succession planning, incorporating is a really important process to consider." ■



Barry, Tracy Chappell and family, Hamiota

4-H Manitoba planning to inspire a new crop of leaders

Since its inception in 1913, 4-H Manitoba has been hard at work developing community and agri-industry leaders. It's no surprise then that the respected organization finds itself at the forefront of a new industry-supported initiative to study the leadership gap in Manitoba and to form strategies to develop an even larger crop of young leaders.

Collaboration key to success

With assistance from *Growing Forward 2's* Growing Visions program, the Manitoba 4-H Council has initiated a strategic plan

and enlisted the help of more than 30 agricultural organizations and industry associations to contribute to the process of leadership development. Clayton Robins, executive director of the 4-H Council says these strategic alliances are key to understanding what needs to be done to encourage young leaders to step forward.

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"As the catalyst to this particular project, the Manitoba 4-H Council is initiating an industry-wide approach to addressing the leadership gap in the middle-aged demographic," says Robins. "Our strategic partners will complete a scan of the current status of leadership development from

their perspective, and also provide insight into any future needs and processes that may be needed to move forward with an enhanced, collaborative leadership development strategy."

Empowering young leaders to step forward

With a collaborative approach and opportunities for stakeholder input, the process is expected to provide the basis for inspired leadership programming.

Bill Ross, executive manager of the Manitoba Canola Growers Association, said his group is eager to see where the gaps in leadership are on a provincial scale and to find out what programming is available or needs to be developed.

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and government," he says. "Hopefully, this initiative can help us all find ways to energize our young people and to encourage them to become involved."

According to Robins, the Manitoba 4-H Council is spearheading the project but the resulting action plan will be industry driven.

"The process is a first step in what is hoped to be a robust, well-designed plan of action," he says. ■