



Top left Jacob Haan backs up a tractor on his family's farm. One of his favourite tasks of farming is driving all the machinery and vehicles.

Top right Jacob takes a break from farm chores to jump on a trampoline with his younger brother. Even though he is a hard worker and enjoys working on the farm, it is also important to take time to have fun.

Middle Jacob overlooks one of the family's sows that has recently given birth with his father, Oliver Haan.

Bottom Jacob prepares logs of wood to be cut for both sale and the family's home.

Farming the Future

Determined young farmer continues to plan his future in agriculture despite industry setbacks

Photos and Story By Michelle Cochrane

Canada is in the midst of a farming crisis that has been described as the worst in the country's history since the depression of the 1930s. Because of higher costs and declining prices, Canada is seeing a decrease in the number of farmers.

Statistics Canada figures show that the number of young farmers has been declining since 1981, when farmers aged 35 or younger represented about 22 per cent of all farmers. By 1996, the figure dropped to 13 per cent.

Today, that number has plummeted to approximately 8.6 per cent.

As the number of young farmers declines, the average age of farmers keeps rising. Currently, the average age of farmers in Ontario is 52 years-old.

Bearing in mind historical commodity prices and discouraging statistics regarding the profitability of farming, it is easy to understand the declining numbers of new farmers

and why current farmers are worried about their future. Who would want to start a career in an industry that offers no optimism or promising opportunity?

Among all the numbers and statistics showing the unsteady life of a farmer is a 12-year-old who remains hopeful. Jacob Haan of Marysville, is part of a minority who dreams of becoming a farmer when he grows up.

"I would rather be farming than be in school," Jacob said proudly. Although there are a few kids in his class who live on farms, he believes that he may be the only one who wants to farm.

Jacob sees himself owning his first farm when he owns his first house, around the age of 20. Until then, he helps out on his family's pig farm, Haanover View Farms.

"I learn the most about farming here and actually doing it myself. I try to go with my dad as much as I can and pay attention, see how everything works."

"I would like to do pig farming and a bit of cattle with some crop... I would grow corn, barely, wheat, and soy beans," describes young Haan.

He believes that if you want to farm, you can't just have the desire but you must also have an understanding why it is important to farm. "I feel pretty good [when I farm], because I know I am helping out my family and

helping out other people too."

"This is something you have to enjoy. You have to want to do it. You have to believe in it. Otherwise, if you turn it into a job, you are not going to last in this game," said Jacob's father, Oliver Haan.

As a first-generation farmer, Oliver described that it is important for him to pass his farm down. Growing up on his current farm, he saw it evolve from its hobby status to a working farm and he would like to see it continue. "The work that was started by my dad, carried on by me will go to the next generation. If Jacob does that, then I'll be pretty happy, pretty proud."

Oliver said it is important that Jacob chooses what he wants to do, that's number one. But he feels he has done as much as he can as a parent to open doors for his son in the world of agriculture. Whether it be tractor and lawn mower pulls, 4H events, or farm shows, he does his best to allow Jacob to see what is out there.

"Nobody pushed me into farming. It was my decision to go down this path. I knew it would be challenging from very early on and I'm sure Jacob has figured it out by now that this is not going to be an easy path," mentioned Oliver.

"Farming is a phenomenal lifestyle. Though it doesn't get the respect it should, it is a noble occupation," said Oliver. "Producing food for

others is noble, it's enjoyable, it's challenging and it is very rewarding."

Oliver said there is a significant food shortage in parts of the world and even in developed countries, there is a food quality issue. He feels that farmers are the only ones who can solve these issues in a manner that society will accept.

"I think that's why farmers need to be there... we play a huge role in the betterment of society," added Oliver.

"To keep farmers there, one thing that is missing is financial viability and that's something that's going to have to be addressed otherwise I don't think that the Jacobs of the world are going to struggle the way generations before them have" said Oliver.

Angela Miller is the vice president and secretary of the Prince Edward County 4H association and she believes that there isn't as much doom and gloom as many seem to think. Miller feels there are a lot of youth who want to get into farming and believes we will see the numbers increase over the years as the baby boomer farmers retire.

Miller believes that the new generation of farmers will no longer commit 22 hours a day to farm work and will bring a stronger marketing and business background with them.

"They are going to farm differently and I think that is a good thing," said Miller.

