

Pun or not, this son flowered into a terrific farmer and helped make both his and his dad's dreams come true.

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PHOTOS BY JAMIE COLE

A Calling, *Found*

“I tell you,” declares Rodney Fraser, “when that window opens, you’ve got to jump through.”

Fraser is not plotting his escape. Instead, he’s acknowledging one of the facts of farming that’s all the more critical in Ontario. That’s where he lives and farms, on land that has been in his family for six generations.

Up here, he says, “we can get the first frost as early as the first of September ... and we’ve actually finished up combining corn many years in snow. That may not be unique as farming goes elsewhere, but it does [make] fall a very small window to get stuff done.”

Considering all he has under way these days, for Rodney such a sprint to winter creates a serious bottleneck. His window of opportunity is, if you will, more akin to a porthole.

Based at his family’s Anne Vista Farm, about an hour west of Montreal, Rodney and his dad, David, farm some 850 acres, where they raise corn, soybeans and sunflowers, the latter being bagged and sold to individuals and retailers for birdseed. In addition, they run a custom farming operation, serving about 45 customers and providing manure spreading, harvesting and baling. During the winter, they board

and custom feed cattle, and Rodney runs a snowplow.

It can be long hours, but they both grew up in the dairy business, compared to which the Frasers feel like they now live lives of leisure. “Seven days a week with rarely a break was tough,” says Rodney of milking cows at his dad’s dairy, which they sold in 2000.

It was then that Rodney began working off the farm full time. David continued to grow corn and beans on the 250 acres he owned then, but, says his son, “There was enough here to support my dad, but not enough for the two of us. I worked for custom operators during that time and realized I wanted to do my own thing. So, I started my own custom manure business.”

It was a risk to go out on his own, but it paid off and Rodney bought the farm in 2004 from his dad, who continues to work, but these days for his son. Since then, the Frasers have doubled the amount of acreage they own. Yet, as it is with many farms, it’s the custom work that pulls the weight, allowing the Frasers to spread the cost of bigger, better machinery that can be used on their own farm as well as their customers’ farms. “We always joke that’s why we do custom work,” Rodney says with a grin. “So we can afford to cash crop.”

Rodney and David have roots at Anne Vista going back to the 19th century. “The main part of the land,” says Rodney, “has been the Frasers’ since the crown,” referring to when it was held by the Canadian government.

“My great-great-grandfather ... bought this land for the lumber that was on it,” explains David. “Once that was cleared off, they started to farm it and we’ve been farming it ever since. I guess that, the history, adds to the pride I have that this land is still ours.”

Residents in this mostly rural area of Eastern Ontario speak French and English, and it’s a region known for its agriculture. Ontario has the fourth most acreage in farms of all the 10 Canadian >>