

\$5



# Farms

Eastern Townships Life & Culture: Past, Present, Future

Vol. 52 - No.7 - April 2025

## Elbows Up, Farmers!

Tariffs & Townships Farms  
Where Local Lives  
NEW! Word Search Puzzle



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 Our office is located on the traditional territory of the Abenaki people (the people of the rising sun).  
 We acknowledge their stewardship and appreciate that we are all guests on Abenaki Territory.

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Vol. 52 - No. 7  
April 2025



"Cow" was first published in the Townships Sun of June 1976.

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## COVER ART



**Jeff McIntyre** is an artist, writer, and publisher whose editorial features have been syndicated in newspapers across Canada. His latest work is a debut graphic novel series, *Salmon Run*, that advocates for mental health through a compelling rock 'n' roll road story. He is proud to have also launched *Blueberry Lake Studios*, an independent publishing company that is passionate about innovative new media.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

# Feet on the Ground

by R.A. Garber

This *Townships Sun* is a microcosm of the nitty gritty of everyday life in the rural Eastern Townships, with its hundreds of farms, conservation and residential areas. That's at the ground level. On this foundation are built our cultural and educational networks, tourism, business, and political concerns.

These days, the politics, especially from our southern neighbour — Trump and his tariffs — are having a dizzying impact on our lives.

It's important to keep our feet on the ground. Stand firm. Elbows up. Buy local. Buy Canadian.

As I read the small print on packages, buying Canadian turns out to be more complicated than I ever imagined. To our aid comes a Facebook group — yuck, I know Facebook is American, but on it are some downright subversive pages. Such as the group, "MADE IN CANADA — CANADIAN PRODUCTS! CA."

Created in 2018, today it has 1,281,343 members. That's about 135,036 more than three weeks ago! It promotes all things Canadian, and is open to "Canadians, residents of Canada, and others who appreciate Canadian products."

It's full of information. For example, "Made in Canada" means at least 51 per cent of the total direct costs of a product occurred in Canada. But "Product of Canada" means at least 98 per cent of the costs are Canadian. Three whole pages of nuances follow. Doing a search for "Eastern Townships, Quebec" brought me to an impressive list of local products.

Why did it take an existential threat to prompt Canadians to buy local? But here we are.

Ironically, Trump's threats have gifted us with a new self-awareness of our sovereignty.

Feet firmly on the ground!

## And Head Held High!

The *Townships Sun* team is flying high these days. Our editorial team carries on our labour of love; Ross Murray will be chief editor of the May issue on performing arts in the Townships. And there's more!

The Townships Young Voices 2025 Awards are happening on Sunday, April 6, at the Dufferin Heights Golf Club. We received almost 100 creative submissions — art, photos, poems, fiction, and nonfiction.

The Photo Archives project just wound up with a series of Photo Detective Challenges in six different Townships locations, and a Historical Photo Exhibit at the Lennoxville Library, still on till mid-April.

Our TownshipsSun.ca blogspace is more active than ever, and the creation of our new communications plan and branding is going forward apace, coordinated by Noémi Blom.

The Subscription Drive is going strong, also to wind-up in April. We're working hard to refine our subscription process, and thank you for your support! We are hoping the boost in our subscription numbers will permit us to publish 10 issues per year instead of nine. We shall see!

In the midst of these activities, we say a grateful farewell to board members Jennifer Brown and Scott Stevenson; the demands of their jobs have led them both to resign. At the same time, we say an equally grateful welcome to Myrthe Langeveld, who has joined us as treasurer.

## CALL FOR PROPOSALS

# Help the *Townships Sun* Find a New Look!

Are you a creative person? Do you know one?

We've got a great opportunity for you!

The *Townships Sun* is evolving, and we want our community to help shape our new visual identity! As a community publication, it is only natural to ask our readers, subscribers, volunteers, and partners for ideas about updating the *Townships Sun's* overall branding.

You read that right — we're looking to revamp our logo, colour palette, fonts, and overall aesthetic — and we want your input!

We are asking our community for proposals. This is not a competition or contest, but rather a way for us to find the best possible new look for the magazine. Please note that we may assess each proposal's various elements separately and evaluate if combining elements from different proposals could create the best branding for the publication. A community effort for a community magazine!

Of course, hard work doesn't go unnoticed — an honorarium will be offered for the selected proposals, and the name of every person who submits a proposal will be added to a draw for a few prizes.

Head to our blogspace (News & Notes) at TownshipsSun.ca to learn more about the submission guidelines.

Let the creativity begin!

**Submission Deadline: April 30, 2025**

# COMMUNITY FORUM

Keep up the great work!!

— David Price, North Hatley

## RE: End-of Life Healthcare (Dec/Jan & Feb 2024)

I wanted to comment on how the standard of composition, regardless of media, has improved in the *Townships Sun*. The two most recent issues sported lovely covers, and Peter Moliner's pieces about end-of-life healthcare spoke to issues that concern me, chronologically speaking. The *Sun's* focus on youth writing is a most welcome development for young authors and for the continuing rejuvenation of the Anglophone culture in the Townships.

— John LeBaron, Acton, Massachusetts

## RE: "What's Up with Santé Québec?" (Feb 2024)

Gerald Cutting's article on Quebec's new healthcare agency induced several expressions of appreciation, and also led to a bit of feedback. He has kindly responded.

The respondent, who wished not to be publicly named, pointed out that the problems Cutting described with the healthcare system are not unique to Quebec. "Indeed, all provinces in Canada are experiencing similar issues with staff shortages, budget issues, timely access issues, etc."

"Yes, healthcare is a major issue throughout Canada," Cutting responded. "However, we must understand that the Government of Quebec moved to create Santé Québec as a means to address these issues." He cited a [February 2025 article by the C.D. Howe Institute](#), which asserted that "Quebec faces Canada's worst primary care access, with more than 21 percent of people without a regular healthcare provider."

Second, the article identifies the "President/Director General" as "Mme. Christine Germaine." Feedback was that this role is, in fact, held by Geneviève Biron.

"It is indeed confusing when we have two presidents," Cutting responded. The Santé Québec website identifies Mme Christiane Germain as "Présidente du conseil d'administration" (editor's apology for misspelling her first name), and Mme Geneviève Biron as "Présidente et cheffe de la direction de Santé Québec."

Third, Cutting wrote that "Santé Québec has the authority to revoke our access plan at any point." Feedback was that "any changes must go through specific procedures and approvals of relevant bodies."

"Much of what is happening in Santé Québec is a work in progress," Cutting responded. "Prior to the establishment of Santé Québec, it was the Ministry of Health and Social Services that had the authority to approve Access Plans. That final authority to approve or revoke access plans now rests with Santé Québec. We certainly hope that consultation would take place but, nevertheless, Santé Québec retains the authority to reject or approve any recommendation."

Finally, Cutting wrote that access to healthcare in English "is seen as a privilege, not a right." Our respondent asserted that "this is a right, not a privilege. ... This right is enshrined in law relative to services in English."

"Yes, this right is enshrined in law through an Act of the National Assembly as is outlined in Bill 96," wrote Cutting, "which gives the National Assembly the sole authority to rule on matters dealing with linguistic rights. We therefore should not assume that the right to services in English is to be considered a constitutional right which cannot be revoked."

"The National Assembly can by majority vote revoke this right and as per the Notwithstanding Clause, thereby close off any possible recourse through the courts. This is to my reckoning much more of a concession rather than a right protected by the federal and provincial Charters of Rights and Freedoms," Cutting wrote. "As we are all painfully aware, the use of the Notwithstanding Clause is a major issue confronting English speakers in our struggle to maintain the vitality of our community."



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Public market in Magog, 2022. (Photo: Mathieu Dupuis. Courtesy, Tourism Eastern Townships)

## FARMERS' MARKETS

# Where Local Lives

by R.A. Garber & Almut Ellinghaus

He put it succinctly.

“We aren’t letting up on buying locally when possible, provincially when local isn’t available, nationally when neither of those can be found, and lastly from any country other than the United States,” commented David Teasdale of CJMQ on my Facebook page. “I have great admiration for our friends in the USA, but their country is proving to be a difficult trading partner to rely on, so we need to rely on ourselves and countries that are more stable and predictable.”

Where to find local produce? We are fortunate in the Eastern Townships to be surrounded by local organic farmers, and their markets. And our farmer-neighbours are fortunate if we buy from them, as indeed will be our local environment and economy.

Many of our municipalities, members of Parliament, and centre locales de développement (CLDs) publish directories of public markets in their areas. The Townships Sun will be sharing these with you in its blogspace ([townshipssun.ca](http://townshipssun.ca)) in the coming months, but here is a quick survey of some information sources.

**Brome-Missisquoi.** The Brome-Missisquoi CLD offers a local guide to producers and processors in the MRC, whether organic or not: [cldbm.qc.ca](http://cldbm.qc.ca).

**Memphremagog.** The Memphremagog MRC offers a “rèpertoire gourmand,” an interactive map of local producers, offering cheese, chocolate, blueberries, bagels, and more: [memphremagogvraiment.com](http://memphremagogvraiment.com).

**Compton-Stanstead.** Member of Parliament Mme. Marie-Claude Bibeau has published and distributed an annual listing of farmers’ markets throughout her riding. Will the incoming MP do the same? We hope so.

**Townships-wide.** Targeting tourists, [Tourism Eastern Townships](http://Tourism Eastern Townships) offers the most widespread repertory, although not exhaustive. On their website is a list of 21 farmers’ and public markets: Ayer’s Cliff, Compton, Dudswell, Granby, Farnham, Frelighsburg, La Patrie, Lac Mégantic, Magog, Mansonville, Melbourne, North Hatley, Potton, Saint-George-de-Windsor, Sawyerville, Stanstead, Sherbrooke, Stoke, Racine, Val des Sources, and Waterville.

The Créateurs de saveurs Cantons-de-l’Est offers a directory of organic producers who sell at source: You-Pick farms, local cafés, ciders, cheeses, wines, and more: [createursdesaveurs.com/repertoire-des-createurs/](http://createursdesaveurs.com/repertoire-des-createurs/)

These days, I recall with particular poignancy the advice of the François Tanguay, retired director of Greenpeace Quebec: If I have to choose between buying local produce and that labeled “organic” from another country, he said, I would choose local every time. Who know what “organic” means there, or how it is regulated? You can actually visit your farms here! There’s more accountability.

Not to mention avoiding the environmental impact of transporting produce long distances.

Local is beautiful; so is small. And they live here!

Check [TownshipsSun.ca](http://TownshipsSun.ca) (News & Notes) for upcoming news about local markets.

As Canadians come together at this time,  
thank you for supporting your local media.

Subscribe today.



# Complicated, Confusing, Convolutated

by *Dian Cohen*

More than two-thirds of the Townships is zoned green. Within this area, we produce a big chunk of the country's eggs and poultry, a significant portion of its milk and milk products, and far and away most of the world's maple syrup.

Every one of these products, and others, is a target for tariffs. Here's where it gets complicated. Even though tariffs raise prices, some of our farmers love them. Our dairy, egg, and poultry farmers say they can't live without them. Why? Because they stop the American economy — ten times bigger than ours — from flooding our markets with enough cheaper products to bankrupt Townships farmers.

Supply management and Canadian quotas are the price of food security. (Technically speaking, tariffs and quotas are a little different: Tariffs are taxes that governments place on specific imported goods. Quotas are import limits that prevent more than a set amount of a commodity from being imported into a country.)

Tariffs are just bad business for other farmers who produce and sell their goods across the border. Russell Pocock farms a wide variety of produce near Compton. He sells into the US through a Vermont-Quebec coöperative. He says the coöp met a couple of weeks ago. "These tariffs will handicap us, but we agreed that we'd pay them because our American neighbour-farmers are struggling more than we are. We get a lot more help from our government than they do."

Therein lies one of the convolutions. Canadian farmers are much better looked after by their governments than are American farmers. Ergo, President Trump has valid reasons to believe that Canada is "mistreating" the United States. Aside from all his other reasons for levying tariffs (as a negotiating tactic for border security, against migration, etc.), he is merely reciprocating tariffs or tariff-like impediments Canada imposed years ago.

There's another complicating twist — governments don't give perks for free — regulations are quid pro quo. For some of our farmers, tariffs are the least of their worries. "Tariffs are just another barrier to profitability heaped onto regulations that grow like mushrooms," says Mary Ellen Kirby, a Townships livestock farmer. "Mother Nature's uncertainty makes it hard enough to plan; political uncertainty is worse than tariffs, and government regulations are the straws that are breaking our backs."

In Quebec, agricultural activities are regulated, among others, by the Agricultural Operations Regulation and the Pesticides Management Code. There are more than 100 pages of regulations. Every farm must produce an agro-environmental fertilization plan every year.

"Quebec, with a population of nine million, has more public employees than California, with a population of forty million. These regulations are to keep the public service busy."

## What is a Tariff?

A tariff is a form of consumption tax, similar to the Goods and Services Tax (GST). For example, when we purchase a pair of jeans, we pay GST, which is added to the price of the jeans.

The Trump administration is implementing high, variable tariffs/taxes on all products Canada exports to the United States. American importers will pay these tariffs, which are added to the total price of the goods.

## Hypothetical Tariff Scenario

The United States imposes permanent tariffs on all goods it imports from Canada. In response, Canada imposes retaliatory tariffs on their imports of goods from the U.S. This results in lower Gross Domestic Product growth and higher inflation in both Canada and U.S. A stronger U.S. dollar provides a partial offset for American businesses. A weaker Canadian dollar exacerbates both inflation and the weakened GDP. Profit margins decline as businesses absorb part of the rise in costs.

## Selected Quebec Subsidies

- Discounted interest rates on loans
- Grants of up to \$50,000 for young farmers
- Partial reimbursement of fuel taxes
- Crop insurance
- Price stabilization programs
- Financial assistance against excessive rainfall
- Financial assistance in case of certain hog diseases
- Protection against interest-rate hikes

## Tariffs Influence Economic Behaviour

The Conference Board of Canada estimates that temporary tariffs will raise Canadian inflation by 0.7 per cent. The Canadian dollar will fall to 64.4 cents USD. Unemployment will rise to at least 7 per cent. Consumers and businesses will favour domestic goods over foreign ones. This strategy aims to protect local producers and workers.

The longer tariffs remain, the deeper the pain. The United States will suffer a similar but lesser fate because Canadian imports are a smaller part of their GDP and the U.S. dollar will rise, which will lessen U.S. inflation.



*At the George Weller Farm (Courtesy, George Weller)*

All this may be reasonable or it may be overkill. One farmer who wishes to remain unnamed, opined the latter. “Agriculture was the big loser in the revised North American Free Trade Agreement — the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement — and it was signed just when Covid was closing down the economy. Nothing has gone back to normal since then. We are faced with wildly fluctuating production prices (fencing wire, for example, has doubled in price in the last five years), and hardly anyone is investing in farm equipment,” says another farmer who wishes to remain anonymous.

George Weller farms near the Vermont-Quebec border. “We grow Beefalo cattle, hay, vegetables, and wood, all without using harmful pesticides or fertilizers,” he says. “Tariffs make no sense at all — they won’t destroy us, but they will be a big setback. A bigger problem, though, is that we’ve lost the ability to be self-sufficient — we need more people who know how to build things, who know how to plant things, who know how to harvest, cut trees, saw logs, cultivate animals....”

Weller is trying to address this problem by participating in the WWOOF program — Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms — bringing visitors to vacation and work on his farm.

### **What do Tariffs accomplish?**

Tariffs generate revenue for the government. The Conference Board of Canada estimates that federal government revenues will increase by an additional \$9.3 billion in tariff revenue every quarter. However, despite this revenue increase, overall government revenue balances decline. This is because the tariff revenue will be passed on to businesses and households as “tariff relief.”

In early March, the Canadian government announced an aid package totalling more than \$6 billion to support businesses and workers, new employment insurance (EI) rules because employment insurance benefits are projected to rise by \$4 billion in the second quarter, and an additional \$1 billion in new lending through Farm Credit Canada to help Canada’s agriculture and food industry with potential cash-flow challenges.



How the Canadian and U.S. economies are intertwined  
(Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada)

When Russell Pocock was a young man only recently into his farming career, he was interviewed for an article in the *Townships Sun* (Feb. 8, 1974): “Farming is becoming more and more difficult, unless you’re willing to go big. Those who don’t like being in debt are selling out to city people who are letting the good fields grow into bush. The only ones getting rich off the land are the local realtors and speculators. Young people are wanting to farm but they have to mortgage their souls before the government will help them get started.”

“Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose” – the more things change, the more they stay the same?



**Dian Cohen**, economic and business commentator since 1962, combines an entrepreneurial spirit with public service, advising numerous corporations, governments, and not-for-profits. Recognized by the Order of Canada and the Order of Manitoba, she is the founding director of several public institutions, including the Massawippi Valley Health Centre and Massawippi Valley Health Foundation. [Cohendian560@gmail.com](mailto:Cohendian560@gmail.com)

### Selected Quebec Statistics

- Quebec has a significant shortage of plumbers, pipe fitters, and other skilled tradespeople.
- The number of apprenticeship certificate holders in construction, repair technologies, mechanics, and precision production is declining.
- The number of agricultural workers is also decreasing.
- Quebec increasingly relies on temporary foreign workers, yet fewer work permits are being issued.
- To address the skills gap, Quebec is offering one-day “boot camps” to introduce carpentry, bricklaying, plastering, shovel operation, and electrical work.
- Furthermore, 40 per cent of Quebec farmers are over the age of 55, and few have succession plans in place.
- Farmland values have increased by 24 per cent since 2021, making farm affordability particularly challenging.

# The Reality of Dairy Farming

by Ann Louise Carson

Our beautiful Eastern Townships are home to a vibrant dairy industry. “Dairying” has evolved extremely rapidly, and today’s reality may be quite far from the image that some Townshippers have. In this era of supporting our local economy, let’s take a look at this way of life – so much more than a career – for many of our neighbours.

## The Cow Herself

The best place to start is to appreciate the cow herself – she is an AMAZING being! An average Holstein cow starts giving milk at around 24 months of age. She will have one calf per year, with 50 per cent of cows having at least three calves in their lifetime. An average lactation is 10 months (two months of rest at the end of each gestation), and will yield 11,000 litres of milk, per the 2023 Lactanet Progress Report.

You may have one litre of milk in your fridge: just imagine 11,000 such containers! Statistics Canada places the average milk consumption at 50 litres/year. The school year being 180 days, an average

cow can keep 440 kids in milk for a full school year. To accomplish this great feat, a dairy cow eats approximately 50 kilograms of food per day (largely forage based) and drinks 100-150 litres of water, while pumping 400-500 litres of blood through her system for each litre of milk produced.

Milk is 90 per cent water, 4 per cent fat, and 3.5 per cent protein. It has fourteen essential elements and with Vitamin D added, it is a Super Food.

## Where Cows Live

Farmers are paid on a component basis, so they strive, with feeding, and genetic and general best management practices to increase the fat and protein produced. Fat is needed for butter, and protein is a basis for cheese. By the way, farmers get paid \$4 for a pound of butter – no matter what price you pay!

The average Quebec dairy farm has 82 cows, along with the replacement stock – the younger animals, says



The Keenan Family at the 2022 Richmond Fair. L to R: Devin, Brogan, Tim, Maria, Kianna and Ryley. (Photo: Brigitte Goupil)

the [Producteurs de lait du Québec website](#). Quebec has 50 percent of Canada's 9,443 farms — we are the dairy province!

Canadian dairy farms contribute \$9 billion to our GDP, an impressive number which grows to \$19 billion when you add all the players, from truck drivers to processing plants, reports the [Dairy Farmers of Canada](#). The Canadian industry is directly responsible for 195,000 Canadian jobs, equivalent to the combined population of Sherbrooke, its boroughs, and Cowansville.

Coming back to the Townships, 422 farms and 11 processing plants in the Estrie region contribute \$432 million to our local economy and yield just under 4,500 jobs — the population of Richmond plus Ayer's Cliff. All because of those beautiful cows doing their thing! This number doubles when adding similar statistics from Montérégie Est (the western part of the Eastern Townships). Dairy farmers always buy local; feed, veterinary services, equipment, and building materials are just some examples of how they inject money right back into the local economy.

### Our Dairy Farmers

A dairy cow is amazing, but the real credit goes to the farm families taking such great care of their herds. Dairy farming totally remains a family-owned business in Canada. Many count on employees but the core of the work force is almost always family. Nothing keeps a family close knit like doing chores together on a Sunday morning — no matter what time you came home Saturday night!

Due to the extremely long hours, finding employees is actually one of the many difficulties in today's dairy industry. Despite the challenges, farm families are unanimous in believing there is no better place to raise a family and teach work ethics to the next generation.

Gone are the days when you stayed home from school in order to farm. The latest statistics from the *Fédération de la relève du Québec (2021)* showed 86 per cent of youth taking over a family farm have post-secondary education; this is 4 per cent more than in 2016.

### For Our Consumers

To produce top-quality milk, Canadian dairy producers jump through many hoops. Without getting into the many details, each farm meets extremely high standards for milk quality, animal welfare, herd health, traceability, and the environment. By the way, often painted as the villains of the environment, here is the reality: Dairy production represents less than 1% of emissions ([Dairy Farmers of Canada](#)).

Dairy producers deal with countless quality-control checks and balances on a daily basis, and regular third-party inspections. These standards are all about the



*Eighth- and ninth-generation farmers Liz & Angus MacKinnon of Barnston have a dairy farm with Liz's sister Martha and their uncle Peter. (Courtesy, MacKinnon family)*

consumer: when you drink and eat Canadian dairy products, you are getting top quality. And no — the milk contains no growth hormones. Not all countries have such rigid standards.

Like all mammals, cows at times need medication. At these times, her milk is properly discarded and is not at any time pooled with other milk from the farm. Producers are extremely disciplined in respecting withdrawal periods. All milk needs to pass quality testing before being unloaded at processing plant.

Technology and advanced management practices have been largely adapted by our producers to remain competitive and increase their productivity. About **20 per cent of farms use milking robots**, which means cows go to the milking station when they feel the need, and not vice versa. Embryo transfer, sexed semen, IVF, genomics (DNA analysis), and GPS field equipment are but some of the technologies used on a daily basis in dairy farming.

Farming is a complex and capital-intensive business, not to mention having to deal with uncontrollable factors such as weather and trade wars.



(Courtesy, Holstein Canada)

results in further price pressure due to overproduction. U.S. producers are heavily supported by federal funding, so U.S. citizens pay for their dairy products both as taxpayers and at store.

The state of Wisconsin is home to more cows (1.2 million) than all of Canada (just under 1 million), although Canada has roughly the population of California. It baffles my mind why the United States would want access to the Canadian market; we are a small market and would not solve their over-production situation.

In previous trade agreements, partners, especially President Trump, have expressed frustration at not having free access to our market for their dairy products. In the last round of negotiations with the US, it was a surprise, last minute deal breaker. Our federal government officials found themselves having to “give a little,” resulting in cumulative access to 18 per cent of our market.

The first Trump administration was far more damaging to our dairy industry than previous agreements, but this time around President Trump is talking even worse. It seems clear that he wants what he didn’t get last time — total dismantlement of our supply-management system.

### The Power of Canadian Consumers

Access is just that — access. The best way to block access is to buy Canadian; suppliers will stop distributing products

which sit on the shelf. Buy products with the BLUE COW logo (sometimes black) or a maple leaf on the butter, which confirms the product is 100 per cent Canadian milk. This mostly applies to cheese, as butter and milk sold in Canada are always Canadian, with very few exceptions.



Consumers can do so much more! In support of our dairy farmers, make sure our electoral candidates commit to protecting Supply Management — NO MORE CONCESSIONS!

Above all, reach out to a dairy farmer and say “thank you” — it’s a lonely business, at times. You will find farmers at local fairs, at a 4-H show, or at community events. Due to their incredibly long working hours, they seldom take holidays or time off, but they always take time to give back to their community.

That is, unless a cow is calving or is sick — farm families always put their cows first. It’s just who they are.



**Ann Louise Carson** was raised on a dairy farm in South Durham. She has had a 40-year-career in agriculture, including as CEO of Holstein Canada, and was recently inducted into the Quebec Agricultural Hall of Fame.

### Our Great Fear — Trade Wars

Trade wars. This is where fear sets in for dairy producers. Let’s step back to understand this fear.

Canadian milk is marketed in a Supply Management context. This term is often mislabelled in the media and by certain economists as a “subsidy,” which results in higher consumer prices. False! False! False!

Supply Management is all about self-discipline. Producers agree to produce what Canadian consumers need, in return for a fair and stable price which allows them to invest in their future. The only — yet very important — government role is to control borders, not allowing non-authorized products to flood our market.

Consider supply management a “franchise.” That is, farmers must buy a Market Sharing Quota (a very significant investment) to have the right to produce a certain amount of milk. A farmer can’t just buy 50 extra cows and produce more milk, the same way you can’t decide to sell coffee under Tim Horton’s banner without first buying the right to do so.

A quick comparison with our neighbour to the south: Farms in the United States average 347 cows and work in a free market. If the milk price goes down, farmers try to produce more milk to compensate. This often

# Farmers First

by Paul-Conrad Carignan

Armin Ruf is the Anglophone representative at the Union des producteurs agricoles, known as the UPA. Initially representing the Memphremagog-Estrie sector, his responsibilities now cover all of the Eastern Townships.

Born in Bavaria, Germany, Armin came to Quebec with his parents when he was 13 years old. His farm, situated partly in the Municipality of Odgen and partly in the Town of Stanstead, has been his life's pleasure.

According to Ruf, a total of 258 farms are listed as Anglophone in Quebec, out of a total of 4,200 farms. To be listed as a farm in Quebec, an enterprise must have a minimum gross revenue of \$5,000. Once they do, the owners are obliged to register with both the UPA and Quebec's Ministère de l'Agriculture des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation.

The number of farm enterprises listed as Anglophone has diminished over the years, he noted, due to the intermarriage and cultural assimilation of the next generation of farmers with their French-speaking neighbours. They are bilingual and a unique asset to the Townships.



Armin Ruf (Courtesy, Armin Ruf)

Ruf noted that the general public sees farmers in three negative ways.

First, "that farms are a source of pollution." This is not so today, says Ruf. The MAPAQ checks constantly and there are fines for pit overflows and other sources of pollution.

Second, "that animal production is cruel." Treatment of animals has changed a lot, says Ruf. It is not in the interests of any farmers to mistreat their animals. It is counterproductive to the need for full farm income and the pride the farmers have in their animals.

Third, "that tourists visiting the Townships see the farm equipment travelling the road as a nuisance." Armin admits that today's farm equipment is larger and wider than in the past but "there is no choice but to travel on the roads from field to field. We need public understanding."

Far from being a nuisance, farmers in the Townships, as well as farmers throughout Quebec, are our food producers aiding our economy and self-sufficiency.

Ruf sees "self-sufficiency as a slogan that makes good impact" on the public but we are far from that goal. He believes the UPA encourages farmers to supply plenty of food for the Quebec population. "It's terrible to see the increase of food prices in the USA and possibly in Quebec and Canada because of future tariffs."

Besides self-sufficiency, other popular slogans circulating in the Townships about 30 years ago included "Farmers First, Farming First," and even "Farmers Come First." In the organic farmers' group, Les Agriculteurs Ecologistes de l'Estrie, these slogans reflected the belief that our food-producing farmers were the basis of society, and that protecting and prioritizing their vital profession would strengthen society.

Today, it's discouraging, says Ruf, seeing how the continuity of the tradition of family farms and local food production is threatened.

"We can't easily transfer the land to the next generation," he notes. This is because of rising land value assessments and the corresponding rise in taxes for farmers. Also, an Inheritance Tax comes into play for farmers.

Ruf is clear about farm transfers. "To sell or give the farm to our children means that the Inheritance Tax kicks in," making it too expensive for a farmer's children to become new owners. "Typically they become several hundred-thousand and up to millions of dollars in debt right away" because of the rising farm evaluation and the Inheritance Tax.

At the moment, one option for the farmer at their death is to leave a will that splits the farm among their children, making the individual debt load easier to manage for the new farmer. This is legally made possible by the Commission de protection du territoire agricole, or CPTAQ.

Anyone wishing to learn more about our Anglophone farmers are welcome to read *The Advocate*. This magazine is published by the Quebec Farmer's Association (QFA). It offers translated articles from the French language magazine *La Terre de Chez Nous*, and also articles by journalists, presenting English-speaking farmers' points of view. The QFA has a privileged role in the UPA and is "well respected by them," says Armin Ruf.



**Paul-Conrad Carignan** has lived in the Townships since 1982, operating a blueberry farm located in the Canton of Stanstead. He is a member of the UPA and MAPAQ and sells at local markets in Stanstead and Georgeville.

# Head, Heart, Hands & Health

by Maria Enright

Richmond 4-H president Sophie Liebrecht was one of 10 Townshippers participating in the annual 4-H Innovative Ag Tour in Lachute during March break. Over two days, thirty-six Quebec 4-H members visited eight different ag industries, including a poultry farm, a dairy farm, a cheese factory, and a Christmas tree farm.

Sophie is studying Farm Management and Technology at Macdonald Campus of McGill, in Ste. Anne de Bellevue. "One of my favourite tours was at InterMiel, a honey producer," she commented. "It is not something we see a lot in the ag industry. It was nice to learn about something completely new to me."

This aspect of 4-H is one of the reasons Sophie has stayed a member the past 12 years. "Being a member of Quebec 4-H has allowed me opportunities to meet like-minded individuals, who are passionate about agriculture. I have been able to network with people my age, from not just my province but across Canada, and get to meet the future of the Canadian Ag industry," she said.

Quebec 4-H is a community-based organization encouraging personal development in rural and urban youth ages 6-25, while promoting the motto "Learn to Do By Doing." Members use their Head, Heart, Hands and Health to better their club, their community, their country, and their world through skill development and achievement. Quebec has nine active clubs, with three in the Eastern Townships: Hatley, Richmond, and Sawyerville. The provincial membership is just under 300 members, and the three Townships' clubs make up one third of those members.

The majority of those members are English-speaking. In fact, as a minority-language group in Quebec, the main funding for Quebec 4-H is through Canadian Heritage. While most projects and clinics are in English, the clubs welcome both Anglophones and Francophones. These clubs in Quebec were traditionally dairy calf clubs, most originating in the 1930s and 40s. They eventually became known as the Quebec Young Farmers clubs. Over the years, they remained agriculturally based and expanded into other animal projects. Handicrafts and life skills projects are also offered, such as gardening and square dancing. In the early 2000s, QYF joined 4-H Canada. Uniquely, 4-H Quebec is led by a youth board. At a local level, clubs are also led by youth boards, with trained adult leaders to guide the various projects.

The majority of the projects in the Hatley, Sawyerville, and Richmond clubs are animal-based, with beef and dairy being the most popular projects.

Being a farm kid is by no means a requirement to join 4-H. "Leadership, organizational and financial skills, knowledge about agriculture, and so much more were all taught to me through 4-H," said Paige Frost, Quebec 4-H past president.

Paige, currently an Education student at Bishop's University, joined 4-H at the age of 8. While she did not grow up on a farm, she borrowed a dairy heifer from a family friend for her first years in 4-H. Eventually her

mom, Carie Nixon, became a Richmond 4-H leader and together they reintroduced life-skills components to the Richmond club, including scrapbooking, and outdoor and cooking projects. Paige remains an involved senior member of the club, also taking an active role on the provincial board. "I have learned how to be an active community member and share the knowledge that was shared with me in 4-H," said Paige.



Townshippers likely associate 4-H with members showing their animals at Ayers Cliff, Cookshire, and Richmond fairs, or participating in Canada Day and St. Patrick's Day Parades, 4-H dances, ice-cream booths and strawberry socials. Through 4-H, members learn the value of following through on a project, while working together as a team. It is common to see 4-H families return generation after generation to participate in an organization they believe in.

"After my own 4-H experience, there was no doubt that I would be signing my own children up when they were old enough. Being a 4-H member taught me so much about how to be a good leader, the importance of community and giving back. Most importantly, it created life-long friendships," said 4-H alumna and 4-H mom Carly Morin of Pine Legacy Farm in Melbourne.

All three 4-H clubs in the Townships have new ideas for the upcoming year. Hatley is looking to introduce a duck project, Sawyerville will be adding a life skills component, and Richmond began a canine project in March. The hope is to keep offering our agriculture members what they want while diversifying to grow the 4-H movement.



**Maria Enright** is a 4-H alumna and has been a leader for the Richmond 4-H club for 25 years. She is a passionate promoter of the 4-H program. For information on a 4-H club near you, contact Provincial Coordinator Gillian MacDougall at [coordinator@quebec4-h.com](mailto:coordinator@quebec4-h.com).

# Having Land, and Not Ruining It

by Marie Moliner

## ACT I: Fearless Femme Takes on Yet Another Battle

Enter the Protagonist: Heather Ross is a horse veterinarian turned advocate who fought for her husband Bob Blackwood's dignified death. Her work with Dying with Dignity helped relax Quebec's euthanasia laws. Now she's fighting to establish a nature reserve on the 200 acres she and Blackwood purchased decades ago. Like a mama bear defending her cubs, Ross is determined to protect the land and its wildlife.

Ross's property includes cultivated fields, a rare old-growth sugar-maple forest, mixed woodlands, and 100 acres of wetlands. In an interview with the [Sherbrooke Record](#), she explained that her conservation mission began five years ago, when her trail cameras captured images: a bear family, moose, beavers, fishers, foxes, muskrats, snowshoe hares, and, most recently, a lynx. She now counts 111 bird species, ten amphibian species, and numerous threatened insects. Seeing this biodiversity, she told *The Record*, "I've got to somehow preserve this." During a recent talk at the St. Francis Valley Naturalists' Club, Ross emphasized the importance of predator-prey balance in maintaining a healthy ecosystem.

## ACT II: A Fight Between Food, Fish, Fauna, Forests, and Farming

Four years ago, with the support of Nature Cantons-de-l'Est, Ross applied to establish the Blackwood Reserve. After rigorous vetting, the Ministère de l'Environnement, de la Lutte contre les changements climatiques, de la Faune et des Parcs (Ministry of the Environment, of the Fight against Climate Change, of Wildlife and Parks) approved her project. She was told the next steps would take a few years. But four years!?

Eager to formalize the reserve and protect the land for ongoing study by schools, universities, and nature organizations, Ross looked into the delay. That's when she learned that her application, along with 200 others,

had been frozen without explanation. Seeking answers, she heard of a court ruling in Haute-Yamaska that appeared to be complicating conservation efforts. The case involved a request to designate non-arable land as a nature preserve. The court sent the matter back to the Quebec Commission for the Protection of Agricultural Lands, which had originally determined it lacked jurisdiction. She also learned about new pro-farming legislation that seemed to place conservation decisions under agricultural control.

The post-approval steps require the Ministry to publish a notice attesting that the property has been recognized as a nature reserve, after which the landowner is issued a certificate in order for the land to be registered in the Register of Protected Areas in Québec.

Enter Agriculture Minister André Lamontagne, who introduced [Bill 86, "An Act to Ensure the Long-term Preservation and Vitality of Agricultural Land."](#) Intended to combat land speculation, its impact on conservation efforts remains unclear. When Ross submitted a brief to the Environment Minister's office, she was told her documents had been presented to Cabinet, but she was redirected to the Agriculture Minister. Because the time frame to comment on Bill 86 was tight, few environmental groups, aside from Ducks Unlimited and Le Réseau de Milieux Naturels Protégés, provided feedback on the bill. The UPA was invited to present at committee hearings into the Bill, but Ross learned that environmental groups were not. In an interview with the *Townships Sun*, RMN Director General, Brice Caillie, expressed hope that ongoing discussions with MAPAQ officials would be fruitful.

Bill 86 is complex. A [McMillan LLP legal bulletin](#) suggests it could affect non-agricultural landowners. This is a concern for Ross, who fears it will grant agricultural interests unchecked control. "There is zero zoning for nature in southern Quebec," she explained. "Land is either zoned white for development or green for agriculture."

Perhaps Environment Minister Benoit Charette has answers?

Apparently not. His office provided the *Townships Sun* access to [a list of 24 organizations that submitted briefs](#), but offered no position on this bill, which is pitting conservationists, farmers, and foresters against one another.

## ACT III: When Powerful Players Show Their Colours

Ross learned more about Quebec's powerful farming union, the Union of Agricultural Producers (UPA). Formed a hundred years ago to protect farmers' interests, the UPA has evolved into a powerful monopoly often seen as favouring large-scale farming and forestry operations. [A CTV report notes that while the UPA supports Bill 86](#), President Martin Caron warned it could facilitate "underhanded dispossession" of farmland, could cause food insecurity, and "open too



Caleb, Olivier, and Raphael Ménard in Heather Ross's old growth maple forest. (Photo: Heather Ross)

many doors to non-agricultural uses.”

During an interview with the *Townships Sun*, UPA-Estrie VP Christian Kaiser insisted that “It is not the UPA’s role to defend conservation organizations.” Echoing Ross, I asked him whether Bill 86 – which grants agriculture control over all green zones, including conservation lands – was akin to putting the fox in the henhouse. Kaiser disagreed. In his view, “the UPA serves as eyes on the ground,” providing their vision to CPTAQ, the Quebec government agency responsible for regulating land use within designated agricultural zones.

Ross expressed concern that the CPTAQ, which has the mandate to prioritize agriculture, will undermine conservation efforts by treating reserves as speculative land.

Ross said she holds deep respect for farmers. “Having worked as a horse vet on thousands of farms, I know first hand that farmers are the hardest workers.” However, she has seen the environmental damage caused by industrial farming as pesticides contaminate and degrade soil. On her own land, she spent two decades restoring 20 acres of dead soil – previously used for raspberry farming – before it could support hay again. It is understandable that she doesn’t think farmers can be expected to look after the environment without help from conservationists.

Enter a third Minister, Maité Blanchette-Vézina, responsible for Natural Resources and Forests. In February, [Radio Canada reported on her bill](#) to expropriate land to allow Stablex (a toxic waste management company) to expand its activities to include the protected Blainville peat bog. In an unexpected alliance, UPA president, Martin Caron, joined local officials mayors and environmentalists to oppose the expropriation, going so far as to point out that “the wetland is one of the largest north of Montreal and has significant ecological value” (free translation from French).

When Caron’s comments were brought to Ross’s attention, she expressed tempered hope. “This is a good example of how environment can support agriculture and how the Ministries can work together. That is what needs to be put into Bill 86.”

So why is Ross’s nature reserve application still frozen?

Apart from local conservation groups, she says she has found little support from larger environmental organizations. She senses that the UPA and MAPAQ are powerful.

### Intermission

The audience ponders why Ministers, conservationists, and farmers seem to be pitted against each other.

### ACT IV: When Greenwashing Comes Home to Roost

Ross reflects on whether Bill 86 is an example of “greenwashing” – when policies appear environmentally friendly but ultimately promote fallacious solutions. In briefs shared with the media, Ross refutes what she describes as the UPA’s “false narrative of agricultural land scarcity.” According to Ross, “the facts tell a different story. In 2021, Quebec had more farms than in 2016, and urban agriculture in Montreal is thriving. The province also leads in milk, cheese, pork, poultry, apple, cranberry, and maple syrup production.”



Heather Ross (Photo: Courtesy, Heather Ross)

### ACT V: What Is to Be Done?

Ross insists farmers alone cannot safeguard the environment and that conservation and small-scale farming should be part of the solution, not seen as threats. Instead of freezing 200 reserve applications, she exclaimed, “freeze Bill 86 instead!”

She urges that the bill be revised to:

- Restructure CPTAQ to include conservation representation.
- Give environmental groups a voice in legislative debates.
- Require Ministers to raise public awareness about conservation risks.
- Regulate large farm properties while allowing Quebecers to sell land to Canadians.
- Redefine zoning to prioritize conservation alongside agriculture.
- Require collaboration between the Agriculture and Environment ministries.

After our interview, Ross shared [a quote from Andy Warhol](#): “I think having land and not ruining it is the most beautiful art that anybody could ever want.”

Now there’s a sentiment we can all agree on.



**Marie Moliner** returned to the Eastern Townships, after four decades in Toronto, to care for the love of her life, Kevin Whitaker, who died this January. His diseases (Parkinson’s and Lewy Body Dementia) proved to her that “we are what we eat.” She strives to make informed choices about what she eats, where it comes from, and how it affects the water, trees and wildlife that surround her in this paradise she is proud to call home.



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WORD SEARCH

# Farm Lingo

*New feature by Noémi Blom*

23 words that are part of this *Townships Sun!*  
Can you find them in the grid?

- |              |                            |
|--------------|----------------------------|
| AGRICULTURE  | FISH                       |
| BEEF         | GARDENING                  |
| BIODIVERSITY | GENERATIONS                |
| CALVING      | GRAZING                    |
| CATTLE       | HERDS                      |
| CONSUMERS    | HOLSTEIN                   |
| COUNTRYSIDE  | LIVESTOCK                  |
| DUCKS        | MANAGEMENT                 |
| ENVIRONMENT  | RURAL                      |
| EQUIPMENT    | SKILLS                     |
| FAIRS        | VETERINARIAN               |
| FARMERS      | <i>(Solution, page 22)</i> |

M	T	E	D	I	S	Y	R	T	N	U	O	C	A
I	E	J	S	N	O	I	T	A	R	E	N	E	G
Y	R	C	O	N	S	U	M	E	R	S	T	N	E
T	U	S	C	A	T	T	L	E	F	N	A	N	L
I	T	R	S	R	I	A	F	G	E	I	V	E	I
S	L	E	F	U	R	S	N	M	R	I	G	Q	V
R	U	M	X	U	B	I	E	A	R	F	R	U	E
E	C	R	R	E	V	G	N	O	I	H	A	I	S
V	I	A	E	L	A	I	N	S	H	E	Z	P	T
I	R	F	A	N	R	M	H	H	A	R	I	M	O
D	G	C	A	E	E	S	K	C	U	D	N	E	C
O	A	M	T	N	S	L	L	I	K	S	G	N	K
I	D	E	T	H	O	L	S	T	E	I	N	T	Z
B	V	G	N	I	N	E	D	R	A	G	A	Q	X

## ETRC Townships History Quiz

*by Julia Langlois*

(p998 ETRC Graphic Material collection)



**Julia Langlois** is archivist at the Eastern Townships Resource Centre.



- This photograph, taken in 1921, shows a farm located in Huntingville. What kind of farm was it?
  - Cow farm
  - Sheep farm
  - Chicken farm
  - Pig farm
- The Eastern Townships specialized in what agricultural sector before the rest of Quebec shifted towards it in the 1870s?
  - Dairy farming
  - Wool production
  - Tobacco farming
  - Apple orchards
- Where was the first industrial cheese plant inaugurated in the Eastern Townships, and when?
  - Milby, 1861
  - Dunham, 1865
  - Huntingville, 1884
  - Cowansville, 1873

ANSWERS: Page 22

# CROSSWORD FUN IN THE TOWNSHIPS SUN *by Rina Kampeas*

## CLUES - ACROSS:

1. Two teams with the same score are this.
5. Treated an injury.
9. In current slang, equals "Shut the heck up!" (Initialism)
13. Species of palm that bears wholesome berries
14. The Curie who won Nobel prizes in two scientific fields
16. Casual labour is often paid by this.
17. Damages
18. I happen to *love* this brand of hot mustard.
19. Members of the order Strigiformes
20. What's needed to send a letter
22. These may be used for gardening or in home building.
24. Some major events or the deaths of prominent people may be called the end of this (two words).
26. A poem about nature that has been derided by some and loved by others
27. Barely sufficient
30. Secure firmly, root
32. Northernmost region of the Earth
34. A highly useful conjunction
35. Type of pump
39. Less often used conjunction
40. Some good wines are this.
43. An affectionate way of referring to the city of Sault Ste. Marie is "the \_\_\_."
44. Pitcher
46. Vine we associate with old buildings
47. Dismissive name for people deemed unsophisticated
49. Only if
52. Map within a map
53. Mahtani who wrote for the *Sherbrooke Daily Record* during the nineties and the aughts
55. The ones that are here
57. Once the hammer came down, this had been made. (Two words)
59. Two words, one four letters and the other three letters, that both name a certain ornamental curve
63. Jai \_\_\_ (sport)
64. Marvel Comics character aka the Sub-Mariner
66. Plant grown for harvest
67. Mutilate
68. Shred small when cooking
69. British supermarket chain
70. A process for assessing drugs that are already on the market (Initialism)

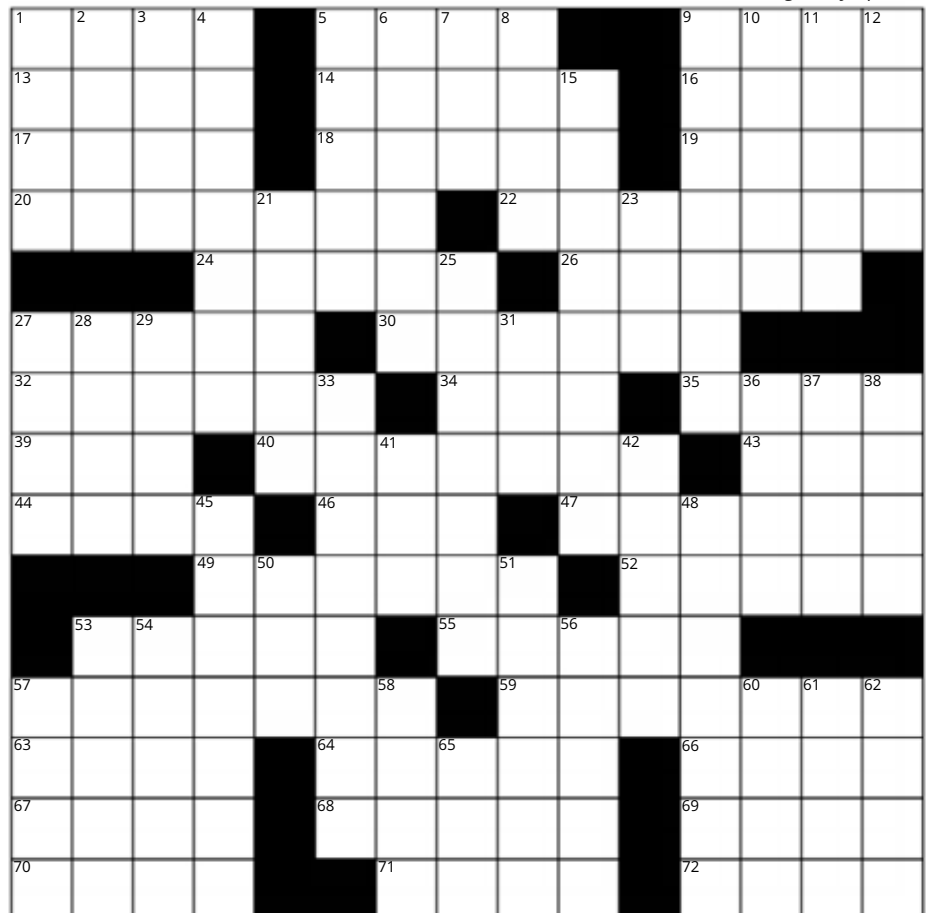
71. Abnormal sac in a cavity of the body
72. A material formed in bogs by decomposition, which can be used as fuel

## CLUES - DOWN:

1. Press on to pack tight (used with "down")
2. Aviation organization headquartered in Montreal
3. Spikes of wheat or corn
4. Far off
5. Representation
6. Device that produces a 5 Down
7. If Julius Caesar had been asked, "Will you be on the other side of the Rubicon this evening?", this is how he might have replied.
8. Soil
9. Gets a morning wash.
10. Vessel pulled by another vessel
11. Ships' bodies
12. In French, a state whose existence ceased on December 25, 1991
15. A green day in April
21. Aldous Huxley's novel \_\_\_ *Hay*
23. What Cortés demanded of Moctezuma?
25. One trained in the Freudian tradition (among others)
27. Of sound mind
28. A corvid
29. City in Israel, known in Hebrew as Akko

31. Yearly exhibition held in Exhibition Place, Toronto (Initialism)
33. If you say you're this, you mean you're relaxing; but if you say an event was this, you mean it was horrifying.
36. Purposes
37. A John Le Carré character might be a this.
38. Short way of referring to the newspaper famously now owned by Jeff Bezos
41. How we say "I have" quickly
42. Sounds that we perceive as meaningless
45. A movie's duration
48. One who wants to do 67 A to someone may do this to the person.
50. Pen's tip
51. Young plants
53. A greeting that means "Peace" (variant spelling)
54. American government agency whose more than 10,000 members of staff were just cut to 294
56. Long-plumed heron
57. Source of light
58. In French, Joan of Arc is called *Jeanne* \_\_\_.
60. A name for Scottish or Irish Gaelic
61. Soft drink
62. Tiff
65. The calendar month that falls wholly in spring

Thanks to [CrosswordGrids.com](http://CrosswordGrids.com), whose blank grid "15 x 15 Sample Crossword Puzzle Grid #9" was used in constructing today's puzzle.



(Solution, page 22)



*Rina Kampeas is a retired freelance translator and a diaspora Townshipper who enjoys solving crossword puzzles. She is exhilarated by the opportunity to construct them for the Townships Sun.*

# Belly Laughs at Dixville Centre

by Xania Keane

My daughter is pouring glitter into a jar filled with water. A student from Bishop's University closes the lid tightly.

My daughter jumps up and down as the student hands her the new sensory toy. Silver specks sparkle and swirl and dance in her hands. She laughs loudly. The kind of laugh that starts in the belly and ends with a delightful squeal.

She's five years old, autistic and loves these kinds of events. They happen once every month at the Dixville Centre in Lennoxville.

"Today we're having an activity for families of children with autism, for both the families and the children. We have a partnership with Bishop's University and they animated some of the activities," says Ann Marcoux, Head Animator for the Dixville Foundation.

The Dixville Foundation funds activities for parents and kids with Autism Spectrum Disorders. It also has a drop-in centre for people with an intellectual disability or ASD every Thursday evening. The Foundation is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year.

Sandwiches wrapped in wax paper, chips, and soda are handed out for lunch. Intricately frosted cupcakes are devoured for dessert. Parents chat about lengthy waiting lists for autism diagnoses. How the path to a diagnosis is long and tricky, but worth it. Listening to different stories and anecdotes, I get the sense that every parent in the room is extremely proud of their child.



(Art: Xania Keane)

"For me, it's a gift to have these kinds of activities. To see parents come together and share their stories. To supply a place where the kids can go and just be themselves," says Ann Marcoux. "And parents who come can just feel comfortable. It's really beautiful. For me the sense of community is so important. Right now, we have about sixteen families that we're touching in different ways. We're hoping to reach more because it's so fun to have all of you with us."

If you or anyone you know could benefit from the monthly activities for families or the drop-in centre for adults, or if you want to know more about the Dixville Foundation, email: [activities@fondationdixville.org](mailto:activities@fondationdixville.org).

An advertisement for Garage JBL Inc. featuring a fire truck. The text includes: 'GARAGE JBL INC', 'CERTIFIÉ C UL US POUR AUTOPOMPE ET CITERNE', 'MAINTIEN DE L'ÉQUIPEMENT DES MUNICIPALITÉS', 'INSPECTION · RÉPARATION · MODIFICATION', 'JAMES LAROCHE', '103, rue Winder, Sherbrooke, Québec J1M 1L6', 'Tél: (819) 564-8405', 'Télé: (819) 564-1539', 'jameslaroche@garagejblaroche.ca', 'www.garagejblaroche.ca'. The background is dark with a fire truck and flames.



*Xania Keane is a mixed-media artist who lives in Newport. She worked as a writer and a touring musician for many years and recently started painting again. (Author photo: Robert Donachie)*

## Canadian Independent Bookstore Day

Saturday, April 26, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

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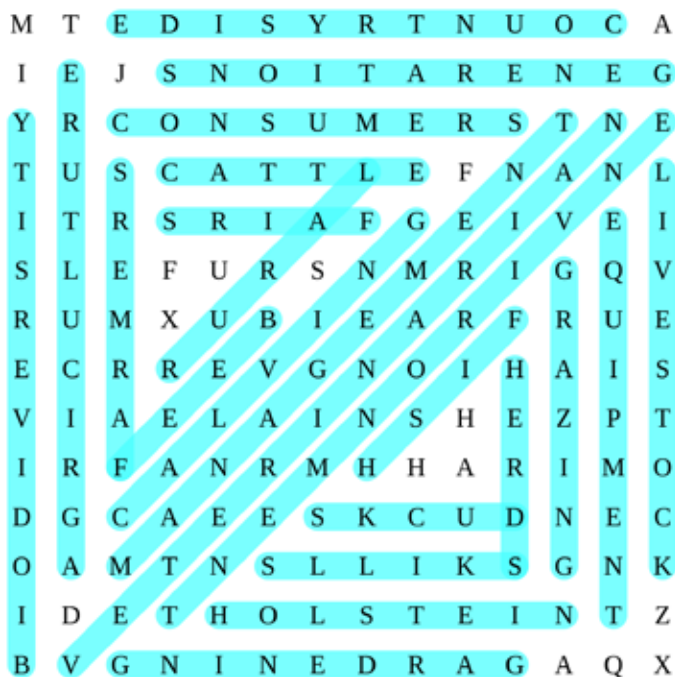
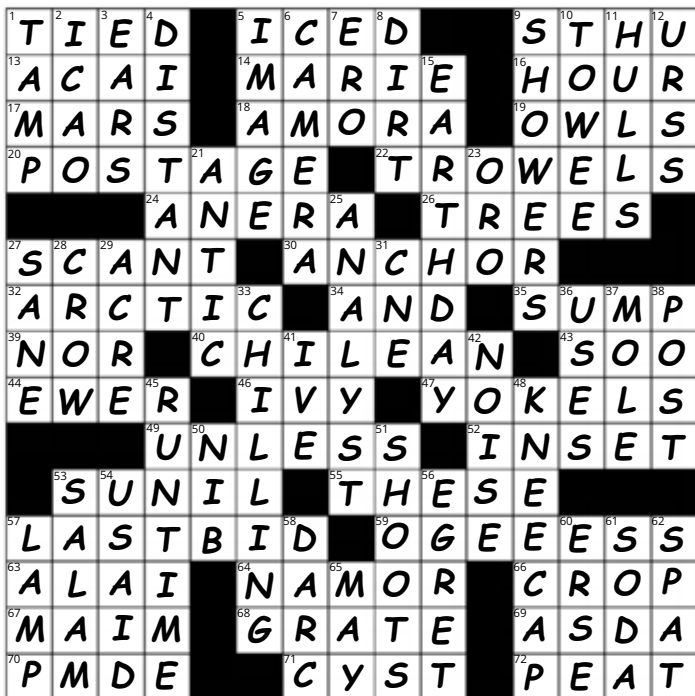
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History Quiz 8:3  
2:V  
Answers: 1:D

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# Brome County, by Stephen Edward Gobby

Review by Melanie Cutting

## **Brome County:** **Book 1 of Tales from the Townships**

by Stephen Edward Gobby (2024)  
Amazon (publisher)  
Paperback, 188 pages, \$38.75

*Brome County* was recommended by a close friend who just happens to hail from the village of Brome, and knew I was in the market for a book related to the Eastern Townships. Since the most recent two books reviewed in this space were nonfiction and historical in nature, I thought it appropriate that this month, we look at something a little different, i.e., a novel.

Chapter 1, the “Last Days of Cannabis Crime,” opens in 2018, and introduces the reader to two of the principal protagonists, including small-time drug dealer, Finn Toomey, who is promptly arrested for marijuana possession. It doesn’t take long for Finn to realize that his friend Stubs had ratted him out. Fortunately, the repercussions are minute, and not only does Finn not end up in jail but he makes the acquaintance of Officer Jojo Allison. This event will prove to be of the life-changing variety for Finn.

Five years later, Corporal Jojo Allison has broken up with her boyfriend and is enjoying a successful career in the local police force. Enter the local band members of “The Rebels” — bandleader Wild Bill Wallis, pianist/vocalist Gemma St. Onge, bassist Augusto Diaz, and Wayne Lacroix, the erstwhile Stubs whom we met in the previous chapter. Stubs is a full-time drug dealer and part-time drummer, but unfortunately for him, he is no longer. All that remains of the Rebels’ drummer is his signature automobile, a flashy red Camaro. Thus, the plot thickens.

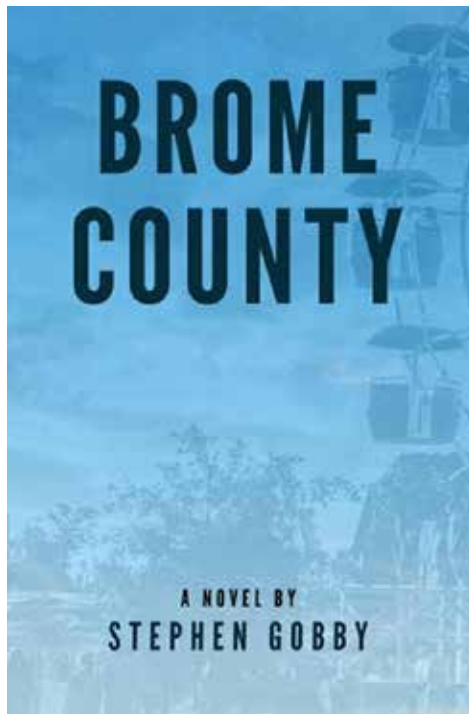
Chapter 4, “The Scourge of Stagecoach Road,” serves as a brief history and introduction to both the area and several characters who play important roles in the next part of the story. Alistair MacKenzie is a retired local reporter, and “bad seed” Archie Wainwright is always in trouble. The reader is whisked from the present back to the 1970s for this section, which is narrated by McKenzie, and chockablock with actual historical vignettes of this resplendent area.

One of the many charms of Brome County is the extensive use of “local colour,” particularly actual bars and eateries such as The Thirsty Boot, the Mansonville Hotel and the Bolton Center Hotel, to name but a few, and the colourful depiction of the “Wild West” atmosphere of that time and place.

Another feature I admit appreciating is the oversized spacing of the big print Gobby has elected to employ. (Could this be a nod to the senior citizenry most likely

to pick up and read *Brome County*?) Virtually all of the pages use an over-sized font as well as over-sized lines, so getting through the 188 pages seemed to take no time at all. Finally, a portion of the historical section of the narrative is devoted to outlining the often explosive results of interactions between the French- and English-speaking denizens of Brome County and environs, and many of us can relate very well to this long-standing animosity.

Without belabouring the story outline any further, it is important — and not really a spoiler — to note that the final chapters take place at an especially wild and woolly Brome Fair outing, when the always changeable Eastern Townships weather sets the scene for a dramatic rescue from the iconic Brome Fair Ferris wheel, depicted on the book’s cover.



Novice author Gobby has done an admirable job of putting together a sustained and intrinsically interesting story line and bringing out the flavour of what I like to call “the Western Eastern Townships.”

“Charming, surprising, and deeply local, *Brome County* is a compelling story of love and the struggle for redemption,” a note on the back cover tells us. Needless to say, it is not to be missed!

Stephen Gobby was born, raised and educated in Montreal, but he has also lived in Alberta and Arizona. A jack-of-all-trades, he has worked as a teacher, police officer, insurance investigator, martial arts instructor, musician and editor, and now, naturally, as a writer. He has authored one previous novel, *Of Brothers and Assassins* (2014). *Missisquoi County, Book 2 of Tales From the Townships*, is currently underway.

The author lives in Knowlton, Quebec, very close to the area where the action of this book takes place, e.g. Brome, home of the wildly popular annual “Big Brome Fair.” Townships readers will love discovering, or rediscovering, the colourful past of Brome County, and all the readers, new and old, will be swept away by the story and the underlying emotions of the main characters brought to the fore with Gobby’s storytelling expertise.



**Melanie Cutting** is a retired Student Services administrator, who worked at Champlain Regional College in Lennoxville from 1972 until 2005. Since her retirement, she has been active in a number of volunteer activities, including Uplands, Meals on Wheels, Townshippers’ Association, and the Townships Sun.

# Riffing with Robert Frost

by Janice LaDuke

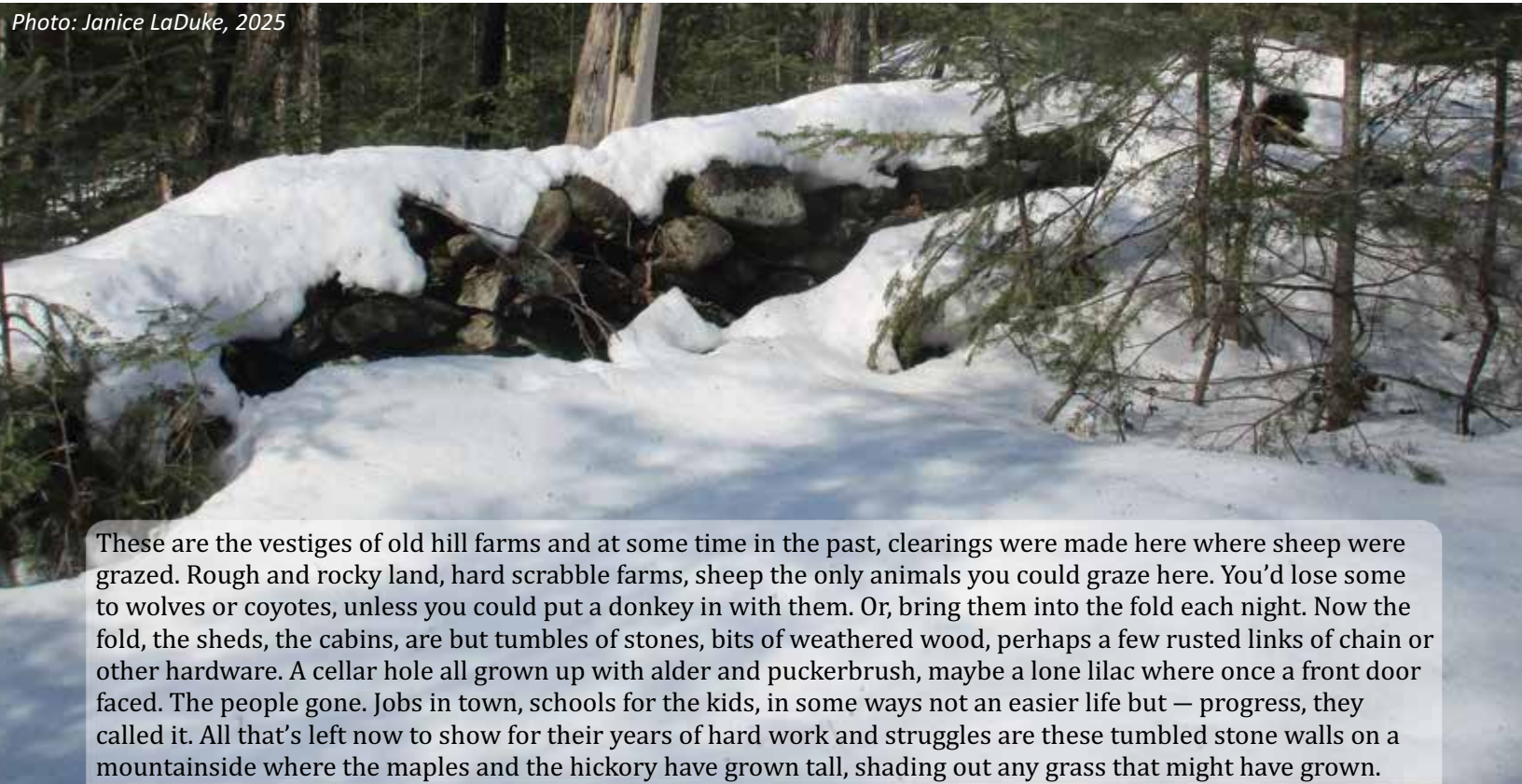
"Something there is that doesn't love a wall..."

...running through these fields and scattered woods. A wall to keep someone out, and someone else in? But, who? There are no cattle in these fields. No sheep, no horses. Herds of deer come grazing through but pay no heed to a wall anyhow. Wall, fence, just something for them to leap over and then carry on their merry way.

Look at me! I go walking through fields and bush, and if a wall or a fence comes up, I just follow it 'til I find a good crossing place, then over I go! Or, in the case of a page wire fence, it is sometimes easier to go through, especially if deer or someone else has already widened a space. I wouldn't do it if there were cattle or other livestock on one side or the other, but usually it can be done. Neither a fence, nor a wall, are impediments to a wanderer.

We have at times found the remnants of a stone wall in the bush and they make us stop and wonder: why? It is no small feat to build a stone wall. Why here, in the woods, where nobody is grazing, no crops are growing?

Photo: Janice LaDuke, 2025



These are the vestiges of old hill farms and at some time in the past, clearings were made here where sheep were grazed. Rough and rocky land, hard scrabble farms, sheep the only animals you could graze here. You'd lose some to wolves or coyotes, unless you could put a donkey in with them. Or, bring them into the fold each night. Now the fold, the sheds, the cabins, are but tumbles of stones, bits of weathered wood, perhaps a few rusted links of chain or other hardware. A cellar hole all grown up with alder and puckerbrush, maybe a lone lilac where once a front door faced. The people gone. Jobs in town, schools for the kids, in some ways not an easier life but — progress, they called it. All that's left now to show for their years of hard work and struggles are these tumbled stone walls on a mountainside where the maples and the hickory have grown tall, shading out any grass that might have grown.

It's quiet now, up in those woods. Just the odd birdcall, a chickadee or a whisky jack, and maybe the sound of running water where a crick is making its way over and around stones, the moss growing thick and green in the shade, lichen peppering the bigger stones. Erratics, those bigger stones are called, that the glaciers left perched on the mountainside, looking for all the world as if you could set them rolling and crashing through the forest below with just a touch of your finger. The devil makes you do it, and you give that rock a poke and then, you quickly realize that, no, that rock's not going anywhere. It was here long before those hardscrabble farmers scratched out a life here, and it will be here still long after we've gone.

Those stone walls, though... They'll tumble as the ground heaves in a spring thaw. The ice and snow will work their way among the rocks and come the melt, they'll topple some more. They're only man-made, and if they're truly needed to keep someone in, or someone out, they'll need mending. Otherwise, let them fall. Let them tumble, the stones scatter. Something there is that doesn't love a wall.



*Janice LaDuke lives, works, and plays in Bulwer, Quebec. She has been in the Townships 46 years, give or take a few. She is a librarian/ bookseller/ gardener/ baker/ musician/ paddler/ Gramma and sometimes she writes.*