

# Farm Management Consultant Says Farm Sectors Most Good Going Forward



A aging hog barn surrounded by a beautiful canola field.

**P**eter Manness, PAg, is a Business Advisor in MNP's Farm Management Consulting group working throughout Manitoba delivering management consulting services and helps implement solutions on a broad range of issues for primary agricultural producers, agricultural industry organizations and producer groups including Hutterite Colonies.

Peter works closely with clients to deliver solutions tailored to help them meet their business and personal goals. He takes pride in helping clients solve their operational problems so they can become stronger farm managers and stay competitive and prof-

itable.

Manness' experience with Elite Swine in some different roles, as a nutrient management specialist within their hog facilities and other areas, and now working with producers on a broad range of issues, he discusses the hog and grain sectors.

"On the grain side, I think there's cautious optimism about what's out there. I believe that there are pockets that are doing well," said Manness. "There are other areas; I think if we specifically look down into the southwest of Manitoba, where they've had much more challenges with moisture than some other areas and are carrying some of those

losses forward, and that's always difficult."

While other farming sectors face additional labour challenges, the hog industry solved the labour problem in part through bringing in workers from other countries, which has worked well for them.

The MNP farm business advisor said there's cautious optimism in the hog sector with producers generally getting through 2017 in pretty good shape having a profitable year for hog farmers, but some challenges exist. That industry hasn't seen significant investments in infrastructure in almost 15 years.

— continued on page 32



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# Farm Management Consultant Says Farm Sectors Most Good Going Forward, cont'd

— continued from page 29

"I think we are going to see some new construction. The whole model is, right now we're sitting with an excess of packer capacity, and the need for finishing spaces. That's got to come from somewhere, whether it comes in Manitoba, or whether it comes in Saskatchewan, packers are looking for pigs, and they're going to find ways to increase that finishing capacity," said Manness.

He said a lot of work goes into building hog barns and much of that industry is not there anymore. Even builders, while still out there will need to see some sustained construction opportunities if they're going to invest back into the hog barn building construction. But even just the development, helping clients through the technical review

process, and the conditional use process, nobody's done that to the scale done before, and so he thinks there's a lot of work that needs to happen.

"I think there will be construction. I don't believe that we're going to see it to the pace that we saw if we go back all the way into the late '90s and early 2000s. Even some of these larger facilities are close to 20 years old," said Manness. "I think there still is a lot of work and community consultation that still needs to take place. There will be, as we get back into this construction phase, good sites for hog barns, and bad sites. I think the producers interested in, and communities surrounding them, still need a lot of work and due diligence to ensure they select the proper sites."

Manness said farmers need to know the cost of the product they produce and sell.

"I think there certainly are more producers doing that. Obviously, I have a bias, because it's what I do for a living, but I believe that it's becoming more and more important because the economics are getting more and more critical," he said. "When land sold for \$100 an acre, it was too expensive back then. But I think, with the price of land, the cost of equipment, it is becoming more and more important to understand that, and the implications of your decisions, and how they're going to impact you in the short term and the long term." •

— By Harry Siemens

## Remembering Bill Vaags, 1934-2017, cont'd

— continued from page 31

I honestly considered Bill as every other person who knew him as a great friend, and someone who knew the business better than most, and if he didn't know something, he'd find out in a hurry. My condolences to the family, friends and the hog and farming industry that

knew no bounds to Bill Vaags.

George M. Matheson, Chair, Manitoba Pork said Bill's career as a pork producer began in the early 1960s, and with his family, he built a progressive, sustainable hog operation that at one time was one of the largest in Manitoba. Always active in the industry, he was a director at Manitoba Pork for 37 years, 11 of those as chairman, and president of the Canadian Pork Council for five. He was heavily involved in the global pork trade, president of Canada Pork International for six years, and an active participant in the creation of NAFTA. To honour and acknowledge Bill's contributions to agriculture, in 2006, he entered into the Manitoba Agricultural Hall of Fame, and in 2010, Manitoba Pork presented him with the Lifetime Achievement Award.

"To say that everyone in the Canadian pork industry knew Bill Vaags might be an exaggeration, but not by much. He had a way about him that drew people in and made them feel that their opinions mattered," said Matheson. "To me, Bill was a colleague and friend, and most importantly, a mentor. He taught me that in our sometimes maligned industry, diplomacy is essential and that it is crucial that producers always present themselves well and with pride. He also taught me the value of consensus. Manitoba Pork's board of directors is the most diverse group of its type in the country, and Bill knew that a united front was necessary to get a useful message out to governments and the public."

"With Bill's passing, the Manitoba and Canadian pork industries lost a terrific friend, and I am sure many producers would say one of their best," said Matheson. •

— By Harry Siemens



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