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# *EYE ON ALBERTA*

ALBERTA MEAT MARKET BY JAIME VEDRES  
*2009. Lethbridge.*



CALGARY



## Kale is Awesome!

From “Five reasons to love Kale,” by Chelsie Anderson, in *Three Year Gardener’s Gratitude Journal: Part Diary, Part Personal Growing Guide*, by Donna Balzer and Chelsie Anderson, illustrations by Mariko Paterson (Friesens, 2018).

“What’s your baby’s name again? Cucumber?” This was an all-too-common response after our second child was born. Before starting my gardening business, and before having kids, I worked in the Calgary Zoo’s show gardens. Most of the plants were annuals: petunias, marigolds, sunflowers, pansies and snapdragons. My practical nature, however, made me fall in love with the edibles that somehow also ended up in the showy garden beds: the kale, the parsley and the peppers with their fruit sticking up like a clipper-cut dyed red and orange. I got a kick out of these plants because they were not only hardy and beautiful, but also super healthy, easy to enjoy and a treat to have around. And so, when we found out our second child was a boy, I immediately wanted to name him Kale.

Fast-forward 11 years and I still feel our son’s name is the right choice. Kale has lived up to his name. Here are five reasons why you need to grow this edible in your garden this summer (and why I was inspired to name my son after it!):

1) Kale is beautiful. As mentioned, it’s colourful enough to be used in a show garden. Get creative and source out interesting varieties, from purple to (almost) black, white and all shades of green. There are also many different textures (some have flat round leaves and others have curly edges). Let these interesting leaf colours and shapes add zest to your garden this summer.

2) Kale is hardy. This is a plant that all Canadians need to embrace. It tolerates cold temperatures, down to minus eight degrees Celsius, and is strong enough to survive major dumps of snow. You’ll love how the harvest season for this crop spans from January to late October, even above the 49th parallel.

3) Kale is a treat. You can easily store this versatile vegetable for a boost of green throughout the winter months. The simplest way is to snap off the leaves and throw them into a freezer bag and into the freezer. Crumple the frozen leaves into soups or smoothies as you use them. Or you can dry your kale crop. Try tossing it in some oil, salt, lemon juice and garlic and then roasting it in a slow oven for an addictive treat that will get your kids excited about eating their greens.

4) Kale is healthy. This is a super food. It’s very high in antioxidants and is often used in those green super powders available in supplement stores. Eating it fresh from your own garden is the healthiest option, as you won’t have to worry about harmful chemicals. You can pick and eat it on the same day, leaving the minerals intact.

5) Kale is easy to enjoy. Our Kale is sweet by nature and easygoing too. As mentioned, kale the vegetable is delicious and super palatable when made into chips or added to smoothies, omelettes, stews, pastas and sauces. Or massage freshly torn

leaves with oil so they’re easier to chew, and toss massaged kale into salads. Get creative and enjoy kale in every season. Whether you’re new to gardening or well seasoned, you can enjoy this crop in your veggie patch, your decorative pots or along the border of your perennial bed. Your neighbours will love kale too, especially if you offer a free “you-pick” section in your garden, or send Kale over to pull their weeds.

The name Kale is an unusual choice, but if the shoe fits? Wear it well.

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

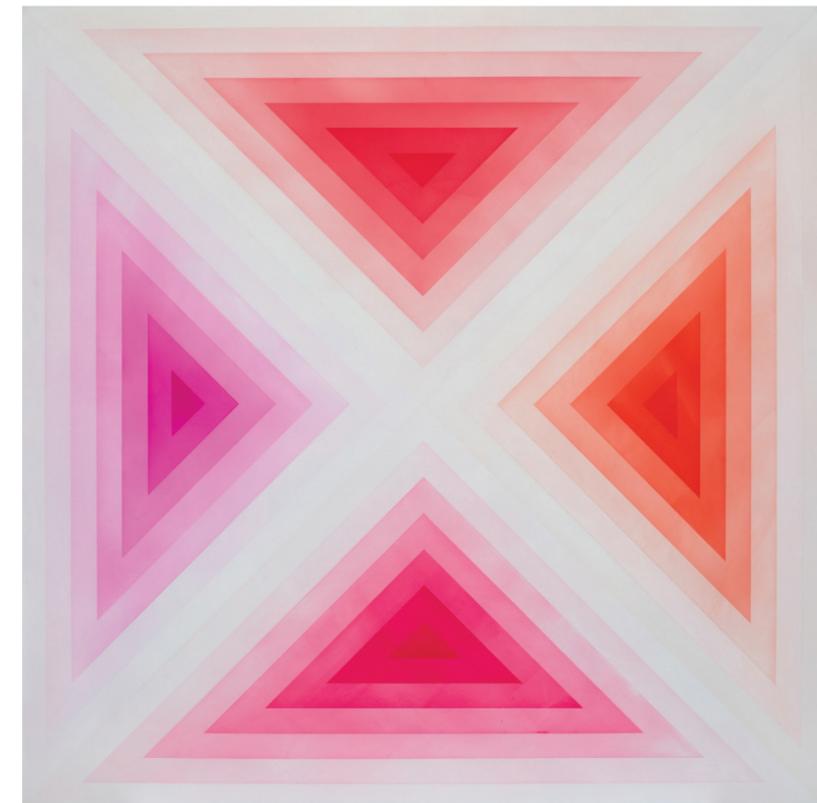


## No Place For a Lady

From *Imperial Plots: Women, Land and the Spadework of British Colonialism on the Canadian Prairies*, by Sarah Carter, (University of Manitoba Press, 2016). Carter is a professor of history, classics and native studies at the University of Alberta. *Imperial Plots* won the Governor General’s History Award for Scholarly Research in 2017.

Establishing farms was white man’s work in the colonies.... In the colony of prairie Canada, the British man would become more manly than his weaker and effete counterpart in the factories and offices of the mother country. Scottish settler Thomas Spence reported from Manitoba in 1879 that “his muscles will be iron, his nerves steel. Vigor will characterize his every action; for climate gives quality to the blood, strength to the muscles, power to the brain.” E.B. Osborn, literary editor of the *London Morning Post*, wrote in 1900 that “to live for a year or two in Western Canada is to learn the essential meaning of a man’s manhood.” As historian Philippa Levine has written, “This vision of masculinity as that which could transform unproductive spaces profitably was simply not an offer to women or to the colonized.”...

British women were not to toil in the fields, to become muscular and masculine, tanned and dark skinned. Impeccable behaviour and demeanour was expected of them, as they were to serve as sharp contrasts to Indigenous women and to peasant settler women from Eastern Europe. In these “primitive” societies, women were understood to be abused and brutalized, made to work outside, while the British allegedly protected and respected proper womanhood by relegating women to the home. The Doukhobors, settlers from Russia, were used to illustrate the stark contrast between the desired and the condemned activities for women. Doukhobor women had hitched themselves to the plough to break land in their settlements and had to “sweat in the fields instead of horses.” In Canada they needed to be reclaimed from the “brute level to which they had been degraded, to the home, with its cooking, its spinning and its weaving.” Levine writes that “women thus became a fulcrum by which the British measured and judged those they colonized. Women became an index and a measure less of themselves than of men and of societies.” In the colonies, British women were to be symbols of cleanliness and purity



SPECTRUM-RED BY MARIE LANNOO

2017. Acrylic on aluminum. 60" x 60". Newzones Gallery, Calgary.

in contrast to women of other ethnicities, and they were to maintain and display genteel dress and deportment. Kitchen gardens and flower beds were acceptable, as they upheld and perpetuated genteel identities. Farm labour was not acceptable.

CASTOR



## Millennial Farmers

From “Passing on the family farm takes nurturing of the family,” by Nikki Wiart, her inaugural column in *The Western Producer*, Nov 23, 2017. Wiart is a new farmer living in Castor.

I’m a millennial. I don’t buy diamonds or napkins or cereal. I lack manners. I am entitled, I am impatient and I can’t seem to stay in one place, let alone work one job for long enough to be taken seriously. (Or so the media would have me believe.) I am also one of the nearly 25,000 Canadians under 35 who consider themselves farmers.

Whether you call us—and by us I mean anyone born between 1981 and 1997—millennials, Gen-Y-ers, Generation Me-ers, Digital Natives or one of the many other names designated to this group of tech-savvy, risk-taking, commitment-loathing people, a certain amount of contempt is attached.

My goal with this column isn’t to make older generations

of farmers love millennial farmers and it isn’t to speak for an entire generation of farmers my age. That isn’t fair, nor is it accurate. My goal is to get a dialogue going between the fastest-growing age group of farmers (70 and older) and the one, though growing, that still accounts for the smallest percentage of farmers (35 and under). Because while it’s great news that the number of farmers 35 and under has grown for the first time in 25 years, it’s alarming that only one in 12 farms has formal succession plans in place, and that since 1991 we’ve lost, on average, more than nine farms a day.

I don’t believe it’s because young people don’t want to farm. I do believe a lot of obstacles are in their way. Land is expensive. Equipment is expensive. Farming is chaotic and unpredictable.

If young people aren’t from a farm, these obstacles are nearly impossible to overcome. If they are returning to a family farm, the expectation to “do as Dad did” is present and so heavy.

Earlier [in 2017], at a workshop on succession in Lacombe, an older farmer stood up and spoke of how he was worried his “dream” wouldn’t be continued. My cousin, a young farmer near Sundre, responded: If you don’t allow for young farmers to pursue their own dreams, how will they succeed?

It’s not about whose dream is better, and it’s definitely not about entitlement. It’s about working together to make sure the family farm doesn’t disappear. If older farmers don’t make room... the land and the infrastructure will be gobbled up by Canada’s industrial agriculture machine.

CALGARY



## Farmers' Debt Yoke

From "Worrisome level of farm debt in western Canada," by Sarah Pittman, Canada West Foundation, *cwf.ca*, Aug 3, 2016. The article was originally published in the Regina Leader-Post.

For the 23rd consecutive year, Canadian farm debt has hit a new record. In the west the debt load is particularly severe, raising questions about the future of this vital industry. Farmers in British Columbia are faring best, with only \$6-billion in debt. Manitoba and Saskatchewan are middle of the road, with more than \$8-billion and \$13-billion respectively. Alberta's farmers, however, carry an eye-popping \$20-billion in debt. In Alberta and Saskatchewan, outstanding farm debt has increased more than \$5-billion in the last five years.

The only thing of more concern than those numbers is that no one is talking about them. I grew up on a farm in southern Alberta. Growing up in a farming community, I learned early on that debt was just part of the game if you want to grow, or even maintain, your operation. But it was only recently that I learned just how much debt western farmers are carrying.

There are several reasons for this, but a few stand out as particularly important. As the debt load of each western province has increased, the number of farmers in each western province has decreased substantially. In other words, farms are being bought, sold and consolidated into massive farms.

For farming, it is true that debt is often a necessary evil. You need capital to buy the land, animals and equipment for expanding a farming operation, which increasingly means taking on more debt. Debt is often required for operations of all sizes—purchasing land, replacing equipment, buying feed and making up for years with low prices.

Another factor, perhaps the most important, is the prime interest rate. This is established by the Bank of Canada on eight predetermined dates per year. The prime rate will be changed if the Bank of Canada thinks it will help fight inflation in the long term, or will help a number of the bank's short-term goals such as fighting unemployment. Therefore, even though farming can have influence on the prime rate, it has no greater influence than any other industry in Canada. The prime rate can and will rise, regardless of the impact on the farming industry. In the past 23 years, we have had mercifully low prime interest rates. The payments a farmer makes on their operating loan is based on their credit score and the prime rate. As a result, farmers have had lower interest rates than in the past, enabling them to go deeper into the red than they once would.

Some debt is necessary. But how much is too much? At what point do we need to decide that we are in way over our heads, and, sooner rather than later, we are going to be in serious trouble? Anyone who had a farm in the early 1980s will surely remember the debt crisis. In the 1970s, prime interest rates were low. However, as a result of several factors, the prime interest rate skyrocketed in the early 1980s to an average of

19.29 per cent by 1981 from 8.5 per cent four years earlier.

While the prime rate isn't expected to make that kind of jump anytime soon, it is bound to change, and with it the interest rate on farmers' operating loans.

EDMONTON



## Removing the Trough

From "NDP dismisses Agricultural Financial Services Corp. board over problems with expense claims," by Emma Graney, Edmonton Journal, Jun 13, 2016. The PC-appointed former CEO of AFSC—which provides farm loans and crop insurance—was paid \$732,104 in salary and other payments in 2015. A new board, paid half the financial compensation, was appointed in May 2017.

Unnecessary travel on the taxpayer's dime, and gifts of booze, theatre tickets and rounds of golf have resulted in the suspension of three top-level executives at an Alberta Crown corporation and the dismissal of its entire board. An anonymous tip to government in [Nov 2015] sparked an investigation by the province's internal auditor, who examined senior executive expenses at the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation... Suspended with pay are the corporation's president and managing director, Brad Klak; its chief operating officer, Merle Jacobson; and its vice-president of innovation and product development, Wayne McDonald. None of them could be reached for comment.

"I've lost confidence in the board doing what they were supposed to do, and that was have oversight for the executive," said Agriculture and Forestry Minister Oneil Carlier.

The biggest question in the auditor's report is over reinsurance contracts, which the corporation buys to protect its own insurance. The broker, unnamed in the report, received a five-year contract with the Crown in April 2009 after winning a public tender. However, from 2012 to 2015, the corporation ended up paying the broker about \$300,000 more than quoted in the contract. The broker also did work that wasn't included in the contract, and the contract was renewed early for a five-year term.

According to the report, that same company provided meals, alcohol, entertainment and rounds of golf on a frequent basis over four years to the three executives—a "significant violation" of the Crown's procurement policy and code of conduct, which prohibits gifts of any kind. "Procurement was not conducted through fair, open, competitive and transparent processes, with privilege/favour in selection of the successful vendor," the report concluded.

The report found the suspended executives also incurred bills to the tune of \$342,000 to travel to meetings with reinsurance companies, even though such companies often travel to Alberta. "Trips often included other activities such as golf or entertainment paid for by the broker," the report reads. Carlier said the report's findings speak to a "culture of entitlement" under the previous Progressive Conservative administration.

LEGISLATURE, 1908



## Farm Workers Need Not Apply

From "Compensation Act is altered," The Edmonton Bulletin, Feb 25, 1908. The Act introduced workers' compensation for injuries suffered while employed at a job site in Alberta.

Yesterday afternoon's session was one of considerable interest in the legislature, marked as it was by the Compensation Act, somewhat amended, passing its second reading... An important amendment, or addition rather... very clearly defines the fact that this act has bearing only upon industrial tradesmen, and not upon agricultural communities. The addition reads: "...this act shall not apply to the employment of agriculture, nor to any work performed or machinery used on or about a farm or homestead and ... this act shall not apply to any of the following employments on a farm:

- (a) "Threshing, cleaning, crushing, grinding or otherwise treating grain or sawing wood, posts, lumber or other wooden material,... or pressing hay, by any kind of machinery or motive power,... portable or stationary ...
- (b) "The construction, repair or demolition of any farm building, windmill, derrick or other structure."

The act ... will today be given a final reading.

EDMONTON



## More Likely to Die

From "PC-era government report shows they knew agricultural workplace laws were necessary," by Allison Alberto, a press release by the Alberta Federation of Labour, Feb 21, 2017.

Alberta's agricultural workers are more than twice as likely to be killed on the job than other Albertans, according to an internal government report. The report, which was obtained by the Alberta Federation of Labour through a freedom of information request, is dated February 16, 2015, and shows that an estimated 18–20 Alberta farm workers will die in a work-related accident every year.

The report also shows that there will be more than 4,000 work-related injuries on Alberta's farms, and that at least 400 workers will be out of commission for two or more months because of their injuries... The report, which was created while the Progressive Conservative government was in power, calculates that agricultural workers lose a combined total of more than \$10-million in wages every year due to lost-time injuries. It also shows that for most agricultural employers, WCB coverage costs less and therefore makes more sense than private insurance.

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### FILE REQUIREMENTS

CMYK, High resolution (300 dpi)  
Convert all RGB, spot and Pantone  
colours to 4-colour process CMYK.

EDMONTON



## Thrown Back Under the Bus?

From “Are Bill 6 recommendations about saving lives or saving money?” by Bob Barnetson, Parkland Institute blog, parklandinstitute.ca, Jan 5, 2017. Barnetson is a professor of labour relations at Athabasca University.

Following passage of Bill 6, the government struck five technical working groups to discuss health and safety regulations as well as how to apply the Employment Standards Code and the Labour Relations Code on farms.... The former sets out rules around the terms and conditions of employment in Alberta workplaces, including a minimum wage, maximum hours of work, and child labour laws. Historically, farms in Alberta were excluded from many employment standards.

The Employment Standards working group has made a disturbing set of recommendations to the government around hours of work and child labour. The underlying theme of these recommendations appears to be “Let’s save farmers money.” Implementing these recommendations would mean excluding farm workers from many of the basic employment rights enjoyed by every other worker in Alberta, and would sit uneasily with the purpose of Bill 6, thereby placing the government in a difficult position.

The 12-member working group—most of whom are members of the agricultural industry—recommended excluding farm workers from the provincial rules around hours of work, days of rest and breaks. The ESC normally limits work days to 12 hours, requires one day of rest in seven, and provides for regular meal and rest breaks. The key argument for these limits is safety: long hours contribute to fatigue, which in turn increases the risk of injury. For example, being awake 17 hours is the same as having a blood-alcohol level of 0.05 (i.e., being legally impaired in Alberta). Given that agriculture is already one of Canada’s most dangerous industries, failing to regulate fatigue is ill-advised.

The working group has also recommended exempting agricultural operations from overtime provisions. Alberta normally requires overtime pay when employers demand more than 8 hours of work in a day, or 44 hours in a week. The purpose of this standard is to discourage employers from imposing long work weeks on workers.

Eliminating the rules around overtime—especially in conjunction with eliminating maximum hours of work—will reduce wage costs for agricultural owners, but farm workers (whom Bill 6 is designed to protect) will receive lower wages and be placed at higher risk of fatigue-related injuries.

The working group is also recommending eliminating extra pay for farm workers who work statutory holidays. There is no real argument for this recommendation, except minimizing employer wage costs.

Most troubling are the working group’s recommendations around child labour in agriculture. Alberta’s child labour laws

(as currently written) would preclude children (under 12) and adolescents (aged 12–14) from being hired to work on farms. Remember that Bill 6 already exempts family members from all employment rules, so this standard applies only to children hired and paid to work.

The working group proposes allowing adolescents to work on farms subject to two caveats:

1. Workers aged 12 and 13 can only work 20 hours per week. This is different from the normal rules for adolescents, where work is limited to two hours on a school day and eight hours on a non-school day. The impact of this proposal would be to lengthen the allowable work day and work week during the school year, but shorten it during the summer.

2. Workers under 16 can only be employed if the work has no negative impact on schooling, parental consent is obtained and the work is not detrimental to the health, education or welfare of youth. These requirements basically already exist in the Employment Standards Code and regulations.

Given the high rate of injury associated with agriculture and the particularly vulnerable nature of adolescents at work, allowing adolescent employment in agriculture is not good public policy. It will only be a matter of time before a teenager is maimed or killed on the job. How soon will depend upon which occupational health and safety rules apply to farms, and whether farms are compliant.

The working group is also seeking to reduce the minimum wage for workers under 16 years of age to 75 per cent of the normal minimum wage. The working group’s rationale is that a lower minimum wage will encourage agricultural employers to provide work experience for young people. This rationale obscures farmers’ financial interest in minimizing their labour bill. Further, will young workers really flock to farm jobs if these pay less than jobs in any other industry?

This recommendation could also be seen as the thin edge of the wedge for seeking differential minimum wages for all farm workers and, perhaps, all child workers in the province.... Overall, the working group’s desire to legalize child labour in one of Canada’s most dangerous industries is very alarming. If a box factory owner wanted to employ 12-year-olds using crushers and cutters, people would likely lose their minds. But somehow it is acceptable to routinely expose children to well-known mechanical, animal and chemical hazards on farms? And to make matters worse, the working group also proposes to pay them less than the wages being paid to adults working beside them....

The recommendations of the Employment Standards working group pose a significant political problem for the government. Will the government accede to demands from agricultural operators to save money on the backs of workers—something contrary to the basic principles of Bill 6? And will it throw children under the bus and enable farmers to hire them into dangerous workplaces under conditions that are not allowed in any other provincial workplace? Or will the government continue to do the right thing and guarantee all paid farm workers the same rights and working conditions as every other worker in Alberta?

LETHBRIDGE



## Robot Farms

From “The automated future has arrived, says robotic farming expert,” by Sarah Redekop, Alberta Farmer Express, Jan 5, 2018.

Farming using only robots may sound like something out of the year 2050—but the producers of a barley crop in the United Kingdom argue it’s here now. Researchers at Harper Adams University in Shropshire, England, along with a UK precision agriculture company successfully grew a crop using only automated machines as their farmhands. The “Hands-Free Hectare” project produced a 74-bushel-per-acre spring barley crop without ever having a human step foot on the field. Everything from planting to fertilizing, spraying and harvesting was accomplished using small and simple machinery modified with automated technology.

Autonomous farming on a commercial scale isn’t far away, according to Jonathan Gill, a drone pilot and robotics engineer on the project. “The adoption of automated systems is going to come a lot quicker than we anticipate,” Gill said at the Farming Smarter conference [in Lethbridge, December 2017], adding he expects to see farmers using the technology in five to seven years. “Everybody thinks it’s way off into the future. I really

wanted to show that the capabilities were there now.”

All programming on the equipment was done using software code readily available through open-sourced communities on the internet. Within the hectare, several drones and a ground scout rover performed duties as agronomists. The drones whizzed around taking aerial imaging of the field, relaying valuable crop information back to the researchers.

Drone imagery not only allowed the researchers to evaluate the growth of the crop and how the autonomous machines were doing, but also highlighted areas needing further inspection. That job was given to the ground scout rover, which could take close-up photos and also scoop up soil samples. A “real-life” agronomist would then get to work analyzing soil, weed and plant root information along with the number of tillers found on the barley, said Gill.

Growing a one-hectare crop autonomously certainly doesn’t compare to how growers produce large-scale crops today, but Gill believes producers need to shift their mindset from big to small. Using fleets of smaller machines working together in swarms has advantages over today’s super-sized tractors, combines and implements, he said. “You’ve got reduced compaction and improved resolution that allows us to have a margin gain...” One of the biggest challenges for autonomous farming is [that] many rural areas lack the necessary wifi coverage that enables autonomous equipment to communicate effectively. “As soon as you’ve got that, we’ve got things nailed,” he said.

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#### FILE REQUIREMENTS

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Convert all RGB, spot and Pantone  
colours to 4-colour process CMYK.

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RED DEER



## Field of Poops

From “Human waste ‘backlog’ from Red Deer to be spread on farmers’ fields this spring,” by Lana Michelin, Red Deer Advocate, Jan 15, 2018.

To keep Red Deer’s full sewage lagoons from overflowing, people poop needs to be spread on central Alberta farmers’ fields this spring and summer. This means city council had to approve \$1-million over two years on Monday [Jan 15] to compensate area farmers who will put some of their land out of crop rotation to accommodate treated regional solid wastes—which happen to be high in soil nutrients.

It’s a unique problem that Red Deer city council had to “flush out” at Monday’s budget meeting, according to punster and councillor Ken Johnston. Council heard that Red Deer’s sewage lagoons—the size of about six football fields—are getting very full because of an increase in collected waste from the region. Solid and liquid waste from Sylvan Lake, Olds and Bowden are now being treated in Red Deer, while Blackfalds and Lacombe waste is coming into the city for treatment this year.

It’s not unusual for the City of Red Deer to spread some of the human byproduct on farmers’ fields. It’s been happening for decades, said the city’s development services director, Kelly Kloss. The solid waste is first heated to get rid of bacteria and other pathogens. Kloss said what remains is phosphates and nitrates, which are healthy for soil. Usually this waste has been spread in the fall, after crops are harvested, so the farm fields are not kept out of crop rotation. But two years of bad weather, with late harvests and early snowfalls, have created a “backlog” of solid wastes in the city’s sewer lagoons, said Kloss.

Several councillors questioned spending \$1-million to compensate farmers for a product that’s essentially good for their operations.... In an unintentional pun, Mayor Tara Veer said she sees it as a “pay now or pay later issue. We can deal with it at the front end or the back end.” As councillors chortled, she quickly apologized for her “poor choice of words.”

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA



## The Question of Land

From “Rural Prairie West: Last frontier for reconciliation?” by Roger Epp, Prairie Messenger, Jan 11, 2017. Epp is a professor of political science at the University of Alberta.

In the opening half of Steven Ratzlaff’s play *Reservations*, first staged in Winnipeg in 2016, an Alberta farmer informs his two children that he plans to give a section of land—most of what he owns—to the Siksika First Nation. The farmer has heart troubles; he’s already renting the land out. His daughter, visiting from Toronto, is aghast. She’s counted on

her full inheritance. From a call to a realtor, an old friend, she estimates the value of those 640 acres at more than \$3-million. She accuses her father of acting out of misplaced settler guilt. She warns that he will “be the talk of the town, and it won’t be pretty,” since he’ll be insulting both his neighbours and the generations that preceded him on the land.

The farmer can’t quite explain himself. But neither can he shake the unsettled feeling he got as a child finding an arrowhead. The treaties, he declares, were a land grab; his grandparents, for all their hard work, got their start for next to nothing. He knows there’s no way to make conquest right, and certainly no reason to expect that governments will take real responsibility; so he has decided on what he calls a gesture—a gesture of restitution, not reconciliation. He will still leave something for his children, but they will pay a financial price for what he feels compelled to do.

The premise may be far-fetched, but it does put the sharpest possible point on the problem. The idea that a farmer—even a farmer who knows his Gospels—would relinquish land to the nearest First Nation is intended to be more challenging for the audience and the neighbours, say, than the fact that this farmer, once a widower, is remarried to the Cree woman who came out to the field to deliver parts for his seeder, found him on the ground and called the ambulance.

For land is the heart of the matter.... “If you understand nothing else about the history of Indians in North America,” writes Thomas King in *The Inconvenient Indian*, “you need to understand that the question that really matters is the question of land.” For Indigenous peoples, land is intertwined with language, history, ceremony, sustenance and, in particular places, a sense of home; their removal was governments’ main goal. The story of how prairie land became freehold property under the sovereign authority of Canada, inherited from British “discovery,” is recent and well-documented. It includes the public purchase of Rupert’s Land from the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1870—to the bewilderment and anger of Indigenous leaders, who did not know how it could be owned outright, or sold, even as treaties were being negotiated. The surveyors and homesteaders followed quickly.

The details take those of us who are settler people into unsettling territory. That must surely help to explain why there has been such muted response in the countryside to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s final report into the residential school experience and its call for all Canadians, not just their institutions, to renounce “concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous lands and peoples”....

What might the work of reconciliation look like in places where land still matters?

Let’s start by dealing with the standard deflections. First, the work of reconciliation is not about the wholesale transfer of land back to Indigenous peoples; no one is suggesting that. Second, reconciliation does not require the rejection of one’s own settler ancestors; their stories may in fact offer helpful points of connection and understanding. Third, reconciliation is not simply the government’s mess to clean up; if anything, the work of reconciliation is most necessary in face-to-face settings

## Topsoil

by Kelly Shepherd

*And when the rake wakes up, all earth’s gods are reborn,  
and they dance and sing in the dusty air around us*

—Linda Hogan, *Dwellings: A Spiritual History of the Living World*

Face and arms are dark from these days  
in the sun. Back and chest abruptly white. Farmer’s tan.  
My legs are pale too, and covered

with zits from a week of sweating  
in the same work pants, airless and stiff. Every night  
my eyes are lined with the fine powder

that clouds, nearly invisible, above the topsoil rakes.  
My skin is rough with it. The shower water runs brown.  
Some evenings, home so late

with work so early the next morning, I fall asleep  
without washing my hair. After a week of raking,  
my palms are metallic grey.

What happens when aluminum  
gets into broken blisters? But even with three-day dirt  
and a sore back there are moments:

soft fingers of shade-tree breeze  
on your neck. Music. New boots broken in  
so you don’t even know you’re wearing them.

where people must decide whether to live as neighbours.

The real challenge of a different relationship is that it requires us to step outside the settler mythology that has substituted so comfortably for honest history. The mythology goes like this: There was no one here when we came. This country gave us freedom—land—and we made something of it through our own hard work and sacrifice. The mythology contains some truth and hides more.... [The challenge] is not necessarily that farmers are incapable of stepping outside the settler mythology. Instead, it is that the countryside is now subject to such economic pressures and accelerated change, including larger, more capital-intensive farms and land assembly by outside investors. In many farm communities the status of the next generation is in question. Indicatively, the children of the farmer in the stage-play live elsewhere.

The possibilities of a different kind of rural relationship with Indigenous peoples diminish in a countryside turned into a food-resource plantation, not a place of settled communities.

Put another way, the work of reconciliation is not so separate from that of building respectful rural futures in which responsible practices of food, livelihood and mutuality can be sustained—inclusive of Indigenous communities. For, in the most practical terms, land is still the heart of the matter.

VULCAN



## She Bought a Farm!

From “She bought a what?,” a post by Sarah Adams on her blog Alberta Girl!, May 28, 2017. Her business, Alberta Girl Acres, began selling “naturally grown cut flowers” in spring 2018.

A FARM. Reactions from friends have been varied, from stone-faced shock to soft-eyed dreamy gasps. I’m still adjusting to the idea myself: I bought a farm!? I own five (and a half, but 5.5 doesn’t sound as tight as “five”) acres of fenced southern Alberta greenery/brownery, including a small farmhouse, two shiny quonsets, a garage, a stunning selection of rusted scrap metal, some random tractor attachments, a handful of mystery fuel tanks and an outhouse.

I’ve been fielding a lot of questions, obviously. Folks are very curious, and I would be too! What the hell am I doing? What’s my plan? Do I have any idea what I’m getting myself into? Since when can I afford a farm?? Etc. etc. etc. ... I decided listing some FAQs would be the best way to start this story:

Q: Where?

A: Near the very small town of Vulcan, just over an hour south of the city. And yes, Vulcan as in *Star Trek*, which they embrace wholeheartedly and I just... too perfect. This is so me.

Q: Do you have any idea what you’re getting yourself into??

A: Barely! But this has literally been my dream throughout my adulthood. I spent ages 11 to 25-ish in rural northeastern Alberta, we lived on acreages and the lifestyle is precious to me. I miss it sooo much and my endgame has always been to get back to it. Granted, I’ve never been responsible for wells and septic systems, which are the most intimidating factors to me right now due to this farm’s old and neglected water systems. I’m doing a lot of finger-crossing and batting my eyelashes at the bank right now.

And as far as farming goes, I spent a lot of time on my uncle’s ranch as a kid, which won’t help me at all, but I understand concepts like fencing and animal death and predators and scary weather. I worked on a honey farm for quite a few summers as a sprightly teen/twenty-something and I’ve gardened all of my adult life. Over the past 10 years my intermittent rural obsessions have produced about three different small farm business plans.... A five-acre farm is definitely a lot for one gal to take on, but that’s what kids are for, right? And speaking of my kids, they’re both very excited and love the idea. We’ll see how they feel about it once farm chores kick in, but so far everything is going GREAT.

Also, this is the first time I’ve been able to make a financial decision like this on my own, and I made it as an INDEPENDENT GAL who doesn’t have to: a) find a partner to live this dream with; b) wait until we’re thinking about a future together; c) spend another couple years convincing them to start a farm with me; d) start all over if it doesn’t pan out. This dream doesn’t hinge on a relationship; it’s mine and mine alone. I’m pretty proud of that. ■