

GARY STANFORD

A new season in an agricultural life

By Victoria Russell
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If you're on Twitter, you might know him as "Senator Stanford." And while he isn't actually a senator, Gary Stanford has certainly done a lot for farmers. For the last several years, Stanford has successfully balanced his responsibilities as president of the Grain Growers of Canada (GGC) with his role as a board member for the Alberta Wheat Commission (AWC), while managing his farm and family life in Magrath, AB. Stanford recently stepped down from his role with the Grain Growers. Following his three-year term as president, and three years as vice-president before that, it's clear that he has established himself as a key player responsible for shaping the Canadian agriculture industry by advocating for farmers on Parliament Hill and around the world.

The GGC plays a key role in federal grain advocacy efforts, with a mandate to influence federal policy on behalf of independent grain farmers and their associations, including AWC. Located in Ottawa, its leadership regularly meets with parliamentarians in an effort to represent the farmer voice and provide direction for national policy that supports a competitive and sustainable Canadian grain industry.

Throughout his tenure with the GGC, Stanford was involved with some of the most influential policy files that have shaped the modern era for the grain industry. Leading up



Gary Stanford prepares for an interview on the Trans-Pacific Partnership for Business News Network.

to the shift from the single desk to the open market, Stanford was busy meeting with the federal government and the Canadian Wheat Board, advocating for change. Stanford has travelled all over the world—including stops in Switzerland, Singapore and other parts of Asia—to work with his peers to build new markets for Canadian grain. He was involved in advocating for legislation to strengthen plant-breeding programming while protecting plant breeders' rights, which eventually made its way through the House and Senate. He's done hundreds of interviews, including several on Business News Network, making him one of the most recognizable faces in Canadian agriculture, while helping to shed light on the challenges and opportunities our industry faces.

AWC spoke with Stanford to learn more about some of his most memorable experiences as president of the GGC.

AWC: What is it about politics that motivates you to get involved, especially knowing that your advocacy work through the GGC will keep you away from the farm?

Stanford: I have a specific appreciation for ag politics. Meeting with all the ministers and MPs on the Hill, it's an opportunity to represent farmers and help set the future direction for agriculture. I helped set up the five committees of the GGC that still make up its structure today. Those committees—transportation, safety nets, marketing and trade, sound science and sustainability, and research—they represent the major policy issues

today in ag, and I've been totally immersed in each one.

AWC: Is there a particularly memorable time when you had to go the extra mile for farmers?

Stanford: When I was in Singapore presenting to the Asian buyers at the Global Grain conference, the Australians spoke before me. This was just after the difficult winter we had in December 2013 with the transportation backlog that cost farmers so much. They were slamming Canada, calling us unreliable since our grain wasn't getting to our customers on time. I was the last to speak and it was too late to change my slides. But I'm a proud Canadian farmer and I couldn't believe everyone was talking about us that way. I spent extra time talking about how we were going to work with our government to fix this. After all, we grow the best grain in the world. After I spoke, the representative from Global Grain came up to me and said they'd never seen someone silence a room like that before, and they asked me to come present in Geneva to help build the Canadian wheat markets there.

AWC: How did you balance farm life with your commitment as GGC president?

Stanford: All the travelling I do sometimes makes me wonder if I'm letting the farm fall down and if I'll be able to keep it profitable. But at the same time, it gives my two sons the opportunity to do more day-to-day operations so they can eventually take it over. Also, getting to know the CEOs of grain companies and crop science companies, it's a real benefit to see what the future holds and what new products are coming into the market. Even though I'm away a lot, these relationships actually benefit my farm management. And of course,



From left: Tom Steve (AWC's general manager), Erin Gowriluk (AWC's policy and government relations manager) and Gary Stanford before meeting with the Honourable Lawrence MacAulay, federal minister of agriculture and agri-food.

my wife, Diane, sometimes joins me when I travel so we're not apart all the time. She's really supportive of all the things I'm doing.

AWC: You're very active on Twitter, where most people know you as @senatrstanford. Tell me about how that started, and what motivates you to be so engaged online.

Stanford: About three years ago, at FarmTech, a few people from the younger generation were asking what exactly I do. They asked me to communicate with them better about my work, and suggested I use Twitter. I said, "What's Twitter?" They helped me set up my @senatrstanford account—it was just a joke at the time. But one time in Ottawa I was meeting with some actual senators. I told them my Twitter handle was just tongue-in-cheek, and asked if they were offended. They told me that not only do they follow me, but that they respect what I say, and that the whole "Senator Stanford" thing was kind of funny. I tweet all the time; in an agricultural world, it's a way to connect with other farmers, but also researchers, crop science companies and politicians. Sometimes I know

what's happening before it comes out on the news.

AWC: You have more time on your hands now that you've moved on from your role with the GGC. I know your responsibilities on AWC's board keep you busy, but are there any new projects you're working on?

Stanford: It's nice to be home a bit more often. I've been really involved lately in helping with a pilot project going on in the Magrath/Cardston area. They're working on building an agriculture-focused high school program where the curriculum would prepare young people for a career in ag, whether it's as a farmer, an agronomist or an agribusiness person. Whatever the path, this program would prepare them for it. The intent is to encourage similar programming in other Canadian jurisdictions to inspire students' interest in working in agriculture, even if they weren't raised on a farm.

On behalf of Alberta's wheat farmers, AWC would like to thank Gary Stanford for all of the work he's done to help strengthen the Canadian agriculture industry. We're fortunate to have him on our board for a while longer, as he's truly an asset to our industry and a pleasure to work with.

THE MINDSET OF SAFETY

Start small, keep it simple and let it grow

By Donna Trottier, P. Ag

Farm and ranch safety extension co-ordinator at AgSafe Alberta



Farm and ranch safety has always been a top priority for the agriculture community in Alberta. Farmers and ranchers take the safety of their farms, their families and their employees very seriously. All farms have some degree of safety measures in place; however, farm owners and managers also recognize that there may be room for improvement. Farmers have communicated that farm and ranch safety should be industry-led, and they are motivated to direct the process of enhancing safety practices on their farms and ranches.

AgSafe Alberta, formerly the Alberta Farm and Ranch Safety Extension Grant Working Group, came together as a result of receiving funding from Alberta Agriculture and Forestry through *Growing Forward 2* (GF2). With representation from the Alberta crop and livestock sectors, AgSafe Alberta plans to use the GF2 funding to develop and deliver practical farm

safety education and awareness tools, resources and services. The aim is to provide industry-led guidance to farmers and ranchers who are seeking to enhance safety practices on their farms and ranches. AgSafe Alberta will provide farm safety programming that will enable, empower and encourage Alberta farmers and ranchers to establish sound on-farm safety programs and practices that will enhance the protection of people on the farm while supporting farm productivity.

What do the statistics tell us? Between 1990 and 2013 there was an average of 18 agriculture-related deaths per year in Alberta. Even one is too many, so what steps are needed to create a culture of farm safety in Alberta?

In the fall of 2016, I was hired as farm and ranch safety extension co-ordinator by AgSafe Alberta to manage the farm safety extension project. I started by conducting a gap analysis to inventory the farm safety resources and services currently available to Alberta farmers and ranchers. AgSafe Alberta aims to meet the farm safety needs of the agriculture sector while recognizing the demographic, size and commodity differences of the farming and ranching operations.

An informal needs assessment was conducted to gather input from farmers and ranchers to get a sense of their stance on farm safety. I collected their input regarding the safety tools, education, training and resources that they find useful for enhancing their on-farm health and safety practices.

Farm safety organizations in other jurisdictions were consulted for advice on approaches and programs that proved successful on their farms and ranches. Insights gained from the gap analysis, needs assessment and consultations were used to develop a work plan and farm safety strategy for the AgSafe Alberta program.

In Alberta, because of the introduction of the Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, there are many farmers who are aware of safety legislation, but there is still a lot of uncertainty surrounding the rights and responsibilities of farmers. Recent discussions with farm owners and operators, commodity group directors, leaders and other Canadian provincial farm safety associations revealed an array of barriers to implementing structured safety programs on the farm. When implementing the farm safety strategy, AgSafe Alberta will offer adaptable programming and design approaches to help farmers and ranchers overcome these barriers.

Preventing agriculture-related injuries is complex because there are a variety of factors that contribute to the risk of getting injured. Does farm safety legislation improve safety practices? Legislating “common sense” has proven beneficial in the context of safety, with examples including mandatory bicycle helmet use, child car-seat use and seatbelt legislation. The American, Australian and Irish experiences suggest farm safety legislation, when actively enforced by the government, can lower injury rates. However, legislation alone is not a well-accepted approach. Reducing agriculture-related injuries and deaths requires a comprehensive approach, including education, legislation and using multiple levels of influence. This means farm and ranch owners working in partnership with other members of the agriculture industry, community and health organizations, and government.



Photo: iStock Photo

A farm safety program doesn't have to be complicated—implementing a few simple preventive measures can make a big difference.

The objectives of the AgSafe Alberta Farm Safety Strategy are:

1. Develop and distribute practical farm safety and health resources customizable for farm size and sub-sector.
2. Establish and implement appropriate, practical safety and health programs for farmers, farm families and agriculture workers in Alberta, and ensure training is readily available.
3. Establish and deliver a set of farm safety services customized to the agriculture industry for enhanced farm safety knowledge and capacity.
4. Elevate awareness of the importance of farm safety and regulatory compliance requirements in Alberta's agriculture industry.
5. Influence farmers to manage high-risk activities and improve standards in the use and maintenance of tractors, machinery and farm vehicles.

After establishing the objectives, we then listed recommended actions that would help achieve the objectives. The list of actions was overwhelmingly

long and we realized we would not be able to complete the entire list during the course of the GF2 grant timelines. However, we hope this AgSafe Alberta farm safety strategy will provide a roadmap and form the foundation for effective and stable industry-led farm safety programming for Alberta farms and ranches, now and into the future.

The prioritized actions that we will focus on over the next year include quick-start farm safety planning, farm safety awareness, hazard identification training, risk management training and on-farm safety adviser services. Training and resources will be made available through multiple platforms and will be practical and adaptable to all sectors of the agriculture industry.

Why have a farm safety program? The first and obvious benefit to implementing a safety program on the farm is the prevention of injuries, illnesses and fatalities. A successful farm safety system helps incorporate a safety philosophy into the operation, reduces risk-taking activities and helps prevent incidents. Keeping yourself, your family and your workers safe on the farm is also good for your business.

A safer farm means improved productivity, improved morale, less damage to machinery and buildings, lower insurance premiums, and less chance of enforcement action and associated costs to comply. Safety management systems support due diligence and demonstrate the farm management commitment to safety.

What's the next step for farm and ranch safety on your farm? We know how to grow things in agriculture: start small, keep it simple and let it grow. Your safety program doesn't have to be complicated. A few simple preventive measures go a long way toward establishing a safe working environment. Take the lead by building your program your way, appropriate for the activities and hazards specific to your farm. Talk about the hazards of your operation with everyone on the farm—family, children, employees and visitors. Make people aware of your safety concerns and then do what is practical to control the hazards and reduce the risks.

Stay on the lookout for AgSafe Alberta's farm and ranch safety resource developments in the coming months.