

Change, change, change ...

By Maureen Latta

Today's world is all about change. North Africa is in revolt; the middle class in Canada is disappearing; a major air pollutant, sulphur dioxide, is on the rise, and social media is changing ... well, everything.

That's just a sample of today's headlines. Change is happening, whether good, bad, or in-between.

Our society is obsessed with change. Every magazine and talk show tells us to change as individuals: lose weight, look younger, feel better. Businesses are told they need to manage change or fail. One "change management" article urges readers, "Don't waste a minute: not even the time you spend driving," and suggests that making phone calls behind the wheel is a great way to catch up on tasks.

While those who don't want to change are accused of living in the past, an intense focus on change – whether consciously creating it or managing it – forces us to live in the future, taking us away from the now and from an acceptance of what is.

So what's wrong with focusing on the future? Well, nothing would be wrong with it, except that from a spiritual perspective the future is as illusory as the past. Only the present moment is where transformation is possible. This message is repeated in virtually all the spiritual traditions, from early Christian and Buddhist scriptures to Eckhart Tolle's *The Power of Now*.

"No heaven can come to us unless our hearts find rest in today. No peace lies in

the future which is not hidden in this present instant." These lines were written by a 16th-century Italian priest, Fra (Frater) Giovanni, and are echoed by contemporary Canadian writer Eckhart Tolle: "Being is not only beyond but also deep within every form as its innermost invisible and indestructible essence... You can know it only when the mind is still. When you are present, when your attention is fully and intensely in the Now, Being can be felt..."

All change needs to be rooted in Being, or wisdom; otherwise, it becomes folly.

Let's look at a few of those great ideas for self and business improvement. The majority of people who go on diets gain all the weight back and more. Multi-tasking while driving contributes to an increase in

car accidents. We can all think of great ideas for change that turned out to have unintended consequences, generating more suffering.

"Change without wisdom" could be the slogan for our era.

Even the most sincere intention for positive change can lead to folly if it distracts us from our own innate source of wisdom.

At the heart of every call to change

is the desire for peace – peace within the mind and heart, and peace on an ecological and global scale. Even a desire to be rich and famous, for example, may be rooted in the need to be free of financial worry or to assuage the fear of being unacknowledged, so that the mind can have peace.

"In order to have peace and joy, you must succeed in having peace within each of your steps," says the activist monk Thich Nhat Hanh. This is another beautiful expression of the same message. The words seem too simple to be important. We are used to important things being wrapped in complexity, and we tend to miss what's truly useful. Even in a world of change there are opportunities to apply wisdom.



The deer were plentiful this winter at C-SAW Place, Earthcare's headquarters near Wynyard.



footprints

newsletter

Spring 2011 • Volume 7.1

Newest Genesis donation: Ty Bach Farm

Ty Bach Farm is not the official name of Elaine Hughes's Archerwill-area farm, but for Hughes the affectionate nickname, which is Welsh for "small house," suits the quarter section with its two modest homes and thick forest.

Hughes and her mother Margaret donated Ty Bach Farm to Genesis Land Conservancy this year as a way to secure the future of the land

and protect its forest.

"I just knew it was right," said Hughes, who still resides on the farm. "I had no children, my brother is deceased, and neither my sisters nor their children are interested in the land."

Hughes began discussing the possibility of donating it five years ago. She first heard of Genesis from another Genesis land donor, and ended up attending a land celebration in the Qu'Appelle valley in which Genesis was involved.

"I was moved by the ceremonies," Hughes said. She listened

intently to what executive director Duane Guina had to say about the agricultural land trust. After lengthy discussions between Margaret and Elaine, the mother and daughter decided that Genesis was right for them.

"We decided that giving the land to Genesis was our only hope for it to not be destroyed," Hughes said.

The donation is a joint ownership arrangement with a land management agreement. "We're free to use the land as we have been using it. I will continue to manage the farm and nothing will change," Hughes said. The agreement prohibits

the cutting of trees, ditching and further cultivation. Currently, the 60 cultivated acres are being farmed without pesticides.

The land has been in the family since Hughes's maternal grandparents, Einar and Hannah Johannesen, homesteaded there in 1929 after emigrating from Norway. Einar and Hannah had three children, Thorstein, Oswald and Margaret, then retired and moved to B.C. in the mid-1950s. Margaret married Bill Hughes of Spalding in 1940 and lived on his homestead in the Echo Park School District

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Ty Bach Farm is the latest site to come under the protection of Genesis Land Conservancy Inc.

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Business Plan highlights marketing challenges

“One step at a time,” is Colin McAllister’s advice concerning the GenAssist Phase 2 plan to develop a member-owned cooperative to market grass-finished meats.

GenAssist Phase 2 is headed by a steering committee of small farmers interested in receiving a fair share of revenues for their products. McAllister, of Perspect Management Consulting Inc., completed the business plan for the proposed cooperative in December.

While McAllister sees a definite market for grass-fed beef, the venture poses a number of challenges that will have to be overcome if the cooperative is to be successful.

“There are still a lot of operational items that need to be worked out,” said McAllister. “I hope I provided some direction and guidance that they will find valuable and that helps them as they advance their concept to a commercial opportunity.”

Currently there are 10 producer families involved in the project.

The completion of the business plan is the latest step in a grant between Heifer International and Genesis Land Conservancy designed to assist young farm families. The collaboration initially resulted in GenAssist, a program to provide livestock loans to families. Out of that program grew GenAssist Phase 2, which addresses the challenges of marketing and turning a profit.

Rising consumer interest in the health and societal benefits of sustainably raised food has fueled demand for grass-finished meat. “The industry looks promising overall,” McAllister said, but added that there are significant challenges in Saskatchewan. While consumers are willing to pay a premium for the product, higher costs are likely all along the value chain. “They [the producers] will have to compete on quality, not price,” he said.

McAllister stressed that the organization needs to ensure a sufficient number of producers are willing to commit livestock to the cooperative. And the cooperative needs to provide training and on-going support to help farmers produce a consistently high-quality product. “A clear understanding of actual costs of production is critical in developing a business model that maximizes benefits to producers. This will require diligence from all members of the value chain,” McAllister said.

Other recommendations include:

- Securing a reputable abattoir and value-added meat producer;
- A screening process for new members;
- Keeping the share structure simple and fair;
- Providing seed and finishing services to members;
- Attracting potential competitors to join the co-op.

McAllister pointed out that grass finishing is difficult in cold weather climates, like Saskatchewan’s, and one solution might be to finish the cattle at one site, such as Genesis Land Conservancy’s headquarters near Wynyard.

Fifteen producers attended the GenAssist meeting on March 11-12 at Good Spirit Resort, where value-network champion Rodger Savory and GenAssist steering committee chair Jeff Kinash presented the business plan for AAA Producers Cooperative Ltd.

“The meeting went really well,” Kinash said. “I think the people were impressed with how much work has been done behind the scenes and how thorough the business plan was.”

The presentation covered the holistic goal, key factors of success, share structure, and financial plan. Kinash said one of the biggest challenges ahead is knowing how to raise a high quality grass finished product. Another challenge is finding other producers willing to join to achieve economies of scale. The cooperative also needs to attract investors. Putting together an investor PDF and a membership PDF will help to get the word out.

Kinash said the GenAssist meeting participants also discussed “how big the local food movement is becoming and how it’s getting into the mainstream.” Kinash, who attended the First Saskatchewan Food Summit earlier in March, noted, “When the big retailers are making policy changes to buy local, you know it’s gaining ground.”

The general feeling at the GenAssist meeting was one of excitement and anticipation. “Everybody was excited and everybody wants to get going,” Kinash said. The first branded product is expected to be sold in 2012.

Board member profile

Tara Malinowski: representing small-farm families

At 36 years old, Tara Malinowski is the youngest director on the Earthcare Connections board. She is the mother of three girls aged six to 11, and identifies herself primarily as a homemaker. For Malinowski, “homemaker” is a broad job description. It means growing as much of her own food as possible, home schooling her girls, keeping a greenhouse, and, along with husband Jeff, raising livestock. It also means being resourceful and creative.

“I try to live a creative life, whether that means painting, or sewing, or making music with the kids,” Malinowski said.

She and her family live in Wishart, population 70. She and Jeff moved there as adults; for Malinowski it was a return to the community where she was raised from the age of four to 10, influential years where self-sufficiency was modelled to her by most of the people she knew.

Her parents were teachers, not farmers, but they lived on her uncle’s dairy and grain farm. When Malinowski was offered



Tara Malinowski

access to some of that land, she and Jeff decided to return.

In some ways, the community had changed drastically. The number of inhabitants has declined by a whopping 75 per cent, but the community still offers the same kind of environment she remembers from childhood, one where people live as self-sufficiently and as creatively as possible.

Malinowski’s story is perhaps typical of other young farm families. With access to some land, a desire to live in a small community, and the ability to juggle farm, family responsibilities, and jobs (both Malinowski

and her husband have off-farm employment), they manage to make rural life work for them.

Malinowski was first exposed to Earthcare and Genesis several years ago when she attended one of its meetings in Bruno. Later, Earthcare’s executive director, Duane Guina, invited her and Jeff to become part of a new Genesis project, called GenAssist: New Routes for Tomorrow’s Farmers, funded by Heifer International. This occurred at the same time as her return to Wishart, so the timing was good. They embraced the Holistic Management training provided through GenAssist, and received some livestock to kick-start their small farm operation.

Four years ago Malinowski joined the Earthcare board at around the same time that Earthcare was undergoing changes with its own move to a farm in the Wynyard area.

“I think it’s an exciting time,” said Malinowski, reflecting on Earthcare’s transition to a permanent land base. “Now that we’ve settled into the new location more, we can make some further steps in the development of the organization and the fundraising plans that

Duane has been focusing on.”

Earthcare is in the process of trying to create C-SAW Place, a working farm where people can come to experience sustainable agriculture.

“The idea of a learning centre and demonstration farm I find really appealing,” said Malinowski, who thinks the centre will strike a chord with farmers and anyone interested in food security. “Everyone gets something out of a working model. Seeing with their own eyes, rather than seeing something on the internet – that’s pretty critical.”

She points out that farmers are inundated with information, and they tend to say “show me.” They need to see that something is working successfully, she said.

Malinowski is looking forward to the Earthcare board retreat in April when the board will review past ideas for C-SAW Place and decide how it can move forward.

She is also looking forward to seeing how the GenAssist Phase 2 project turns into a business to help farmers market grass-fed meat. She notes that without the help of Earthcare and Genesis Land Conservancy, this venture would not be possible.

Trust agreement protects forest

Continued from page 1

until Elaine went to high school in 1956. Bill bought the quarter from Einar and moved the family there because it was within walking distance of school. In 1980, Bill built a new house and lived in it until 1993. He passed away in 1999. Margaret stayed on until 2000 when she moved to Wadena, where she now lives.

In 1984 Hughes moved into the original house, set up her own yard, and married. Hughes has lived on the farm on and off since then, in between overseas stints as a volunteer in West Africa, the South Pacific and, closer to home, Saskatoon and Winnipeg.

As a social activist she has been involved in efforts to

protect family farms and natural areas, such as the unbroken land on her own farm. The mixed forest of spruce and poplar covers about one-third of the quarter section and forms a continuous green strip through to neighbouring properties.

“I’m trying to maintain a connected run for wildlife here,” Hughes said. She enjoys the sightings of moose and deer on what she calls her “little piece of heaven.”

Hughes is thankful that the land trust option was available to her. “I think it’s a wonderful concept. I believe in the whole idea of having the land cared for and the stewardship of the land that I trust will happen under Genesis after we’re gone.”



The pond and forest at Ty Bach Farm support a variety of wildlife, including moose and deer.



Footprints is published by Earthcare Connections, Reg. Charity #88186 5620 RR0001. Donations gratefully accepted.

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Reflections

“We must feel that we are supported by that same power that brought the Earth into being, that power that spun the galaxies into space, that lit the sun and brought the moon into its orbit... Those same forces are still present; indeed, we might feel their impact at this time and understand that we are not isolated in the chill of space with the burden of the future upon us and without the aid of any other power.”

- Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (1999)