

Lady Fane Charolais Wins TESA



Aerial photo of terraces, grass waterways and berms. This was the first project David did in 1991.

Profile | Canadian Cattlemen's Association Lady Fane Charolais, PEI

The Canadian Cattlemen's Association (CCA) was pleased to announce The David Francis Farm, of Lady Fane, Prince Edward Island as the recipient of the 2017 The Environmental Stewardship Award (TESA). The seventh-generation farm is operated by father and son team David and Brett Francis and families.

David and Vicki Francis along with their five children have been farming for 36 years, on their seventh generation farm in Lady Fane, Prince Edward Island. The family farm has been designated as a Century Farm, tracing its beginnings back to 1844. Their son Brett recently joined the successful potato and beef operation.

Upon receiving a degree in Agriculture from MacDonald College, David Francis spent 16 years with the Department of Agriculture in roles of Farm Management Rep, Ag Rep and Potato Disease Control Officer and in 1993, he returned to the farm full time.

Brett Francis graduated from Nova Scotia Agricultural College in 2008 with a Diploma in Enterprise Management. He continued to work off the farm between the end of harvest and the beginning of the calving season, until 2015 when he returned home fulltime.

Today, the farm consists of an 80 cow/calf beef operation and 475 acres of Elite seed potatoes and potatoes for Frito Lay potato chips. They also grow barley, oats, corn and hay for rotational crops. The beef herd is made up of



David, Vicki, Keshia and Brett Francis at the Awards Banquet at the Canadian Beef Industry Conference



Aerial photo of the farm taken from the northwest side of the property in early spring



Aerial photo of farm taken from the southeast side of the property, behind the barn. You will see the watering trough at the axis of the rotational grazing, sectioned pasture. The pasture is divided into three sections. The one closest to the barn provided access since the cattle were turned out of the barn after winter. You will notice the three degrees of grazing in the sections. There are round bale feeders in the closest pasture to supplement the feed until the pasture matures and the other fields dry up. The section with the heaviest forage is still inaccessible to the cattle.



Aerial photo taken from the west side of the property that includes the potato storage buildings. In this photo, you will notice hedgerows as well as headlands on the potato fields and strip cropping at the rear of the property.

purebred Charolais and commercial cattle. The commercial calves are sold at 850 lb. as feeders, while the remaining purebreds are sold as breeding stock.

Prince Edward Island has extremely sandy soil and is very susceptible to soil erosion. Sudden rainfall events can have devastating effects on farmland and can cause soil erosion resulting in washouts or runoff. The rainwater can carry topsoil into streams and wetlands. Extreme weather events are becoming more common in the Atlantic Provinces. Due to the nature of this weather, the Francis family try to take more precautions and are constantly looking at ways to avoid as much damage as possible. Given the area's rolling topography, soil conservation is a primary concern on the Francis farm. They assessed the holdings for environmental risks and challenges and in 1991 became one of the first farms in PEI to install an integrated soil conservation system.

Grassed waterways and buffer zones, are natural filters that help slow down and filter runoff before it leaves the field. Terraces and berms allow production to occur on gradually sloped land by reducing the length of uninterrupted furrow. All of these measures reduce soil erosion and help safeguard the health of the adjacent streams and wetlands.

To reduce erosion potential, the farm has invested heavily into soil conservation practices aimed at reducing water velocities leaving fields. The farm has installed 3,800 feet of farmable berms, 23,000 feet of grass waterways, and 12,500 feet of diversion terraces on 1,000 acres of arable crop land. Some properties are also strip cropped to reduce the run-off potential. In addition, through the PEI Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) program, they have retired 35 acres of high slope land and have 1.5 acres of voluntary expanded buffer zones above and beyond the regulated 15 meters.

Due to the nature of potato production on Prince Edward Island and particularly some late season potato varieties, it is very difficult to establish cover crops on fields after harvest. This results in exposed topsoil in fields at the end of the growing season and over the winter months that can be highly susceptible to erosion. To combat this, the farm routinely protects post-harvest potato fields by establishing cover crops or bale busting hay to cover up the bare land and reduce the potential for soil erosion. In a typical year, the farm will apply 200 bales of hay to 70 acres of potato land, and mixed grain will be broadcast seeded on another 300 acres. They have maintained and improved hedgerows on their farm, and have only done selective cutting of their 100-acre wood lot. All of these steps are taken to help prevent the wind and water erosion of topsoil throughout the winter months.

David and his son Brett have been steadily improving their soil conservation measures year-over-year for many years now. For tillage they still use the roll over plow in sloped areas but for tender ground they have adopted the European technology in the Pottinger Syncro chissle plow. They work over half their potato acres in the spring and fall. This practice results in 20 to 30% crop residue on the

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surface for the winter before potatoes. Prince Edward Island potato farmers are required by law to follow a minimum three year crop rotation. The Francis farm has implemented rotational crops for a three to four year rotation with back-to-back hay years on some properties, believing an appropriate crop rotation is paramount to maintaining productive soils.

In the late 1990s the Federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) put the PEI livestock industry on notice that unrestricted livestock access to streams and wetlands would no longer be tolerated. This was done to protect water quality and aquatic life downstream. Ironically, DFO did not apply the same treatment to other Canadian provinces, only on PEI. After much deliberation of the costs and benefits, the PEI livestock industry embraced the restriction of livestock from streams and wetlands across PEI.

On the Francis farm all pastured livestock are fenced from two streams running through the farm. One stream is fed from a fresh water spring located on the farm, while the other runs from a pond on adjacent land. In total, 8,600 feet of fencing along waterways has been installed. To replace this natural source of drinking water, 125 feet of poly pipe waterline carrying water and electricity was run from a well located on the farm. This line had to be buried two and a half feet deep and bored under a roadway to supply water to pasture on the north side of the roadway.

David and Brett were early participants in the ALUS program. This program pays farmers an annual payment on a per/acre basis for conservation practices above and beyond legislated measures. Prince Edward Island is the first province in Canada to have a provincially supported, province-wide ALUS program. PEI's ALUS program was launched in 2008 and today has more than 430 clients. The program assists farmers in reducing soil erosion, increasing wildlife habitat and reducing the impacts of climate change. Through the ALUS program they were able to access funding to help pay for conservation measures.

In addition to the fencing from streams and waterways, the Francis family have made major investments in fencing for a rotational grazing system on 120 acres of pasture. They have three rotational pastures on the south side of the road near the farm and another five on the north side of the road. They are seeing positive results in weight gain and herd health for their animals since they incorporated rotational grazing.

Prince Edward Island is known for its harsh winter storms that can deliver high winds and heavy snowfall. As a result, most beef operations have barns to house cattle from November to May. The Francis farm uses barns with a straw pack. Manure is removed from the barn in the spring and is allowed to compost for 1 to 2 years before applying it to the land. During the composting period, they often hire a dozer to turn it. Manure is applied to 150 acres of land each year, thus improving organic matter which in turn greatly improves



Fenced waterway in the pasture



Part of a 70 acre block of strip cropped land. Recently cultivated potatoes on the right, barley crop on the left. Strip cropping in this section includes potatoes, grain and hay.



Two Louis cattle oilers that help to cut down on flies. Cows also enjoy the back scratcher and the mineral lick.

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Clear waterway with no access to livestock through pasture



Permanent water trough on concrete pad in high traffic area

the water-holding capacity and nutrient levels in soils.

This father and son team are active participants in the PEI Environmental Farm Plan (EFP). This program assists farmers and landowners to identify and incorporate best environmental practices in their farming activities by developing a practical plan for operating their farm in a way that is environmentally sustainable, socially acceptable, and economically viable. This industry led initiative assists farmers in developing a strong



environmental awareness in all aspects of their farming operation. David and Brett have assessed all of their properties and maintain and update their EFP every five years.

Whenever possible; the Francis use technology to mitigate risk on their farm. They use professional crop scouting for effective integrated pest management. They calibrate their sprayer every season, and manage the fertilizer requirements for optimum usage. With his smart phone, Brett follows weather patterns very closely during the growing season, with hopes of avoiding a rain storm when managing their potato, cereal and forage crops. The farm also has provincially approved pesticide and fuel storages.

David and Brett continue to play a major role in public awareness with regard to sustainable agriculture practices. They have introduced the benefits of sustainable farm management to many farmers, encouraging participation in stewardship activities. David is a tireless promoter of the ALUS program, and through his advocacy; many farmers have joined the program.

The David Francis Farm was the recipient of the PEI Soil and Crop Improvement Association 2014 Soil Conservationist of the year Award – Cash Crop Division. Each year this award is presented to a deserving farm business. It recognizes practices that conserve or protect

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soil and water resources. It is awarded by the PEI Soil and Crop Improvement Association.

John Hooper, President of the PEI Soil and Crop Improvement Association said that “as a very successful small farm operation, they (David Francis Farm) are dedicated to growing economic opportunities in rural PEI in a sustainable fashion. They have served their community well, formally through public service and informally through local initiatives.”

In February, 2017, the David Francis Farm was honoured as the recipient of the Gilbert R. Clements Award. This award, named after the late Environment Minister, is given annually to a farm that is economically viable, environmentally sound and socially responsible in the production and/or marketing of high quality food from a sustainable system.

David Francis has a long history of incorporating land stewardship into his farming operation and as a result, he is frequently asked to speak on the topic. An engaging and entertaining public speaker; David recently spoke to the PEI Soil and Crop Improvement Association (PEISCA) conference about his involvement in the ALUS program. He has hosted tours at his farm; and when he can in casual situations, speaks to his peers about his experience of what works and what does not work for sustainable agriculture. David has served as a spokesperson for environmental stewardship in PEI agriculture since he began farming full time, over twenty-three years ago. Through his advocacy and his actions, David has introduced the benefits of sustainable management to many fellow farmers, encouraging the uptake of stewardship activities. These 6th and 7th generation farmers continue to prove that not only is environmental stewardship well established on Island farms, but that eco-friendly practices can be successfully integrated into any modern, thriving agri-business.

David is a member of the PEI Federation of Agriculture, Director of the Maritime Bull Testing Station, Seed Rep for the Summerside District of the PEI Potato Board, long term Director for the Moncton Farm Machinery Show, and Director for the Maritime Charolais Association. Last year David accepted the

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Blowing snow, this picture demonstrates the potential for significant water runoff in the spring.



request to represent the PEI Cattle Producers as a Director on Canada Beef. Brett and his wife Keshia keep busy at home on the farm with two children, Helene and Florence. They are expecting their third child in the fall.

The farm has hosted many tours including the Canadian Charolais Association, the Annual Maritime Charolais Association summer picnic and tour, many Agriculture Certificate Programs from local high schools and has hosted a non-denomination community Christmas Service in their barn. They also welcome many visitors who have questions or interest in farming on PEI. David and Brett will be hosting a bus tour for the Dundas Soil and Crop Improvement Association of Ontario this summer. The farm is always happy to donate farm produce regularly to local community events and fundraisers such as church suppers and local school lunch programs. All five of David and Vicki's children were involved in their local 4-H program and have shown their purebred Charolais cattle throughout the Maritimes and at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair in Toronto.

David and Brett would like to thank the PEI Cattle Producers for this nomination for the TESA Award, especially Rinnie Bradley for all her patience and time spent collecting and organizing the above information.

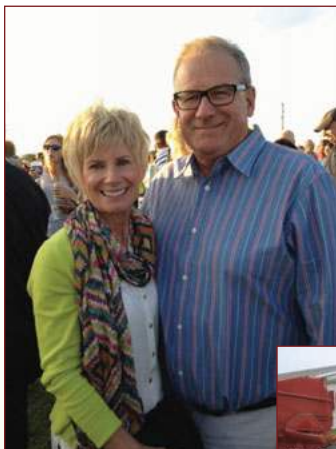
The TESA award is presented annually. Nomination or application details can be found on the Canadian Cattlemen's Association page:
<http://www.cattle.ca/sustainability/the-environmental-stewardship-award/how-to-nominate/>



Undisturbed waterway on the pasture on the east side of the property. This one is fed from a fresh water spring that starts on the farm.



David Francis harvesting potatoes with hauler beside



David and Vicki Francis



David with two of his granddaughters, Happy Harvest is complete!



Potato harvest 2016, Keshia, their children and niece



Brett, Florence, Helene and Keshia



Helene checking the bull pen



Inside view of barn