

# Two generations of innovative thinking helped pave the way

*Embracing the idea  
of trying new things*



Growing up on a farm, Kyle Jewell always knew his future would be in agriculture.

But the third-generation dairy and crop farmer admits that years of on-the-job training didn't totally prepare him for the challenges of expanding the family farm to accommodate the addition of he and his wife Jane and brothers Logan and Joel in the business.

"When you expand, it's not that much different from starting over," says Jewell, 34. "We had a situation where the farm was geared for one-and-a-half people, my dad full-time and his dad part-time, and suddenly you're bringing three families in."

In 2009, Jewell Dale Farm in Meadowbank broke ground on a spacious 106-stall barn fitted with new efficient technology designed for animal health and comfort. It replaced an old barn that over the years had been converted for beef, then pigs and then dairy cattle.

Since then, the family expanded from milking 40 cows to 120 cows, farming 1,000 acres of feed crops, and continually exploring new ways to make the farm as efficient and sustainable as possible.

"It was a learning curve," says Kyle, standing in the bright domed barn, which has motorized curtains that can be raised to let in natural light and air. The cows rest on foam mattresses and eat mixed rations developed with the help of a nutritionist.

"Farming today is very technical and everything you do has to be well thought out. Efficiency is everything."

Luckily, Kyle was raised in a family environment that embraced the idea of trying new things.

"The last two generations have been very open to change," he says. "My grandfather left a very secure job at Canada Packers in 1959 to farm and was always forward-thinking.

"He didn't expect his son to do things the same way he did, and my father is the same way."

That's why Kyle jumped at the opportunity to take part in PEI's Future Farmer Program offered under the federally and provincially funded Canadian Agricultural Partnership.

The program offers new farmers financial assistance to take training, invest in new technology, and use lab testing programs to get their operations launched and running successfully.

"It's been a good experience," says Kyle, who is in his fifth and final year with the program. "We made use of a little bit of everything.

"We did some soil, water and manure sampling. I was also able to take some training on a computerized cropping program that I now use a lot.



"I also sat in on a 2021 online Ontario Agriculture Conference that was followed by weekly Tech Talk Tuesday Zoom sessions from the University of Guelph that covered a lot of interesting topics."

The Future Farm Program also covered a portion of the cost of some new technologies on the farm, including a computerized ventilation system in the barn, a time-cutting hay rake, a more crop-friendly combine header, and a European robotic milk feeder for calves that has taken a lot of the stress out of weaning.



"A little financial help like this makes a difference when you are young and it takes everything you've got to keep on top of a business," says Kyle.

And those investments are paying off.

The programmable ventilation system, in combination with a wall curtain that is automatically raised and lowered and controlled by a weather station on the roof of the barn, keeps the animals comfortable with fresh air and cow-friendly temperatures.

The rake, which has a unique fork design that gathers the hay more quickly and gently, has cut raking time in half and produces higher quality forage.

Kyle says he is excited to see how the new draper style head on his combine will improve the harvest of the farm's 1,000 acres of corn, soybeans, wheat, barley, and hay, as well as its custom harvesting side-business.

"It's low to the ground and it uses rubber conveyor belts instead of augers, so it does a better job picking up and handling the crop."

In the calf barn, the once familiar sound of calves bawling when they were weaned off milk is gone.

Now, calves walk into a pen when they are hungry and suck at a rubber nipple attached by a hose to a feeding machine that mixes powdered milk replacer on demand. The unit keeps track of how much each calf is drinking on their way to a daily maximum that is tracked using a chip in the calf's ear.

The calves follow a 70-day program that gradually tapers the calves off the milk replacer.

"Now the calves aren't even aware they are being weaned," says Kyle. "They are less stressed and their health is better."

Kyle, who manages the crop side of the business, says continuous improvement will always be the name of the game on the farm.

"The biggest thing for me on the cropping end is sustainably getting as much out of every acre as possible," he says. "I've worked a lot with agronomists and done a lot of soil and tissue sampling to make sure a crop gets everything it needs to become the best feed ingredient."

"With the cows, my brother Kevin Logan works with a nutritionist and samples each feed ingredient every week to make a recipe tailored to the cows' needs."

As for the creature comforts in the barn, Kyle says happy and contented cows are more productive cows.

"We are looking after them and they are looking after us."

