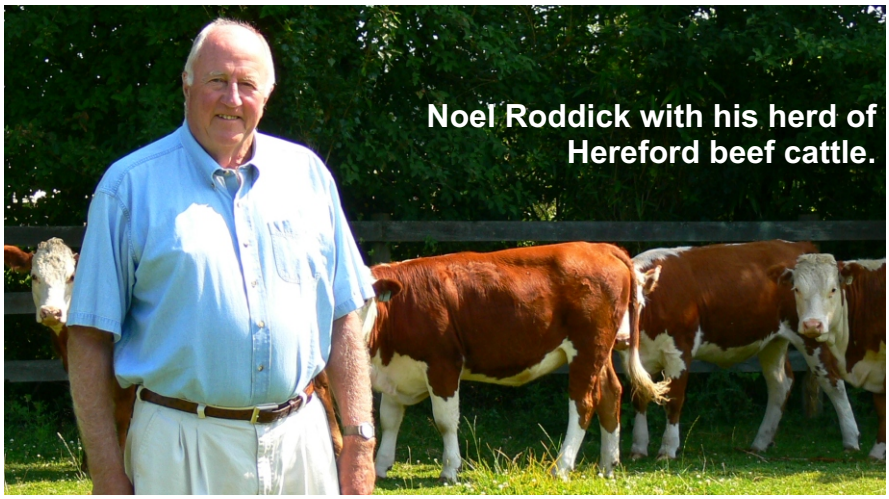
Farmland and Wildlife

Newsletter of the Delta Farmland & Wildlife Trust Vol. 18. No. 1 July 2012

Interview with Noel Roddick

Noel Roddick has been active in the farming community of Delta for 50 years. Graduating from the UBC Faculty of Agricultural Sciences in 1962, he immediately began working in Delta for Brackman-Ker. Noel started Roddick's Feed and Farm supply business in 1970. He retired as head of the company in 2012. Noel was a founding director of the DF&WT and has served as a director for a total of 16 years since 1993. In a recent interview, Noel recounted his experience with farming in Delta.



Noel Roddick with his herd of Hereford beef cattle.

Why did you decide to start a fertilizer company here in Delta?

"I was working for Brackman-Ker; when they folded I decided to start up my own fertilizer company. I had a lot of ideas about how to specialize fertilizer sales for the farming community. The idea was to provide a complete package for farmers. We'd take soil samples and then develop custom fertilizer formulations for each field. We'd have custom mixes for each of the different processing crops, and even for different potato varieties. And all the fertilizer would be delivered to the farmers field. That gave us the edge in competing with bigger companies. For a while we also sold locally-grown feed grain in Washington state."

What kind of changes have you seen within the farming community?

"Many local farms had dairy operations associated with them, and there were far more processing companies for vegetables. Back in the 70's we had Lucerne, Fraser Valley Foods, Royal City, Hall Packing, and Snowcrest, all buying peas, beans , and sweet corn from local growers for the fresh-frozen market. Nowadays, only Lucerne is left, as well as BC Frozen. At the time, sugar beet seed was grown in Delta, but the advent of hybrid seeds and precision seeding equipment made it impossible for Delta, with its wet September weather, to compete with the prairies. We've seen the acreage of potatoes increase, as well as more cranberries, and far more blueberries."

What would you say is the largest challenge to farming in this area?

"The soils here are fertile and produce good crops, but they are difficult to work because of the high silt content. They are heavy and hard to till and get compacted when wet. The climate appears to be getting wetter, so farmers are delayed in getting into their fields to work the land. Farmers have adapted to this by investing in larger equipment and 4-wheel drive tractors. The larger, more powerful equipment means more land can be prepared in a day, allowing farmers to somewhat offset the later season start. As a result, farmers here have a greater investment in equipment per acre compared to areas that have lighter, sandier soils"

Continued on next page...

Join us on September 8th for "Day at the Farm"

at Westham Island Herb Farm. FREE ADMISSION!

Interview with Noel Roddick, continued:

There seems to be a general interest in local food production, yet many people living in the City of Vancouver are unaware of specific issues related to farming. What would you like the general public to understand about farming?

"What people don't realize is that they have year-round access to high quality, safe food products like dairy, eggs, and meat that cost, on average, only 10% more than the average world price of those same foods. Here in BC, we have supply management and very few agricultural subsidies, compared to other countries. Supply management, such as quotas on eggs and milk, means that these foods are not overproduced, which would devalue the food and lower the return to the farmer. In the USA and UK, subsidies account for 48% and 52%, respectively, of farm income, whereas in Canada it is only 9%. Even if you consider supply management as a form of subsidisation, which I don't, it still only accounts for 19-21% of farm income."

Living on Westham Island, an area of Delta that is renowned for its abundance of migratory bird species, you must have seen quite a lot of wildlife.

"I can't believe how many snow geese there are on the fields, especially during March and April. They and other waterfowl are interesting birds, but they put a strain on the farmers by grazing hay and pasture. We should be more appreciative of what farmers do here on the Fraser delta to support wildlife."

How do you see the farming community of Delta evolving ?

"Though stats show that the average age of farmers is increasing, there are young farmers coming on in all sectors, including berry, dairy, and vegetable production. I think with their commitment to farming, we can continue to feed people in the lower mainland. Food awareness campaigns, like DF&WT's **Day at the Farm** event, have made the public more aware of the importance of farmland, and I would like to see a market for all that can be grown in Delta. I would also like to see areas of farmland expanded, particularly by expanding the Westham Island dykes onto foreshore areas. That would create a greater land base for growing food."

Noel has been a source of knowledge and expertise for the farming community for the past 50 years. His value within the community was summed up in a straight-forward way by local dairy farmer, Ken Davie: "*We sure are missing having Noel Roddick around*."

Wildlife & Farming Research Updates

Grassland Set-aside Research

With the help of BCIT students Christina Perkin and Sara Mimick, DF&WT conducted a study to see how grassland management can benefit raptors. Some studies indicate that mowing can increase the value of grassland habitats for raptors by making their prey, small mammals, more accessible.

Sara and Christina monitored the density of small mammals and recorded raptor hunting behaviour in mown and uncut Grassland Set-asides. They found that there were more voles in the uncut areas of the Grassland Set-aside.

This wasn't surprising, as previous research had shown that greater grass cover means more voles. But did the raptors hunt more over the mown areas where the voles might be easier to catch?

Despite the shorter vegetation in the mown strips, the raptors spent more time in the uncut strips. Based on these results, mowing doesn't seem to increase the value of Grassland Set-asides for raptors. In fact, mowing can actually decrease the abundance of small mammal prey.

Winter Cover Crop Research

There are many different types of plants that farmers can use as cover crops. Since 1990, farmers in Delta have planted spring barley, winter wheat, oats, and fall rye. Waterfowl like Snow Geese feed on these cover crops during fall, winter and spring. How many birds do these different crop types support? DF&WT has completed a 3-year monitoring program to determine how these different cover crops can be managed to maximize the benefit to migratory waterfowl. The results showed that winter wheat supports more waterfowl the earlier it is planted; planting in August is ideal for supporting

Trumpeter Swan grazing on winter wheat.

maximum number of ducks and geese. Compared to winter wheat, spring barley grows fast; it grows too tall for ducks and geese if planted before early September. Clover, a cover crop that local farmers have been experimenting with in recent years, provides feed for waterfowl throughout the winter and into the spring.

The Cover Crop research was funded with support from the Agriculture, Environment & Wildlife Fund. The fund was created through a partnership with Investment Agriculture Foundation, the Government of Canada and the Province of BC.

Funding provided by:

Canada Investment Agriculture Foundation of British Columbia BRITISH COLUMBIA The Best Place on Earth BC AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION ardcorp

The Real Price of Food

Sean Smuckler, UBC Food System Researcher

If I buy a pound of potatoes at the market what am I actually paying for? Or more importantly what am I not paying for? The money I provide is in exchange for what I hope is a nutritious and tasty vegetable. Embodied in that price is certainly the hard work of the farmer and farm workers, the price of the land, the cost of the fertilizer, the cost of the diesel used to run the tractor and the costs of all the other management activities farming potatoes requires. What may not be incorporated into the price are the impacts from those management activities on the water I drink, the air I breathe, the wildlife I appreciate, and the soil and climate my grandchildren will rely upon. These ecological goods and services I expect to get for free. But should I?

Farmers are compensated for the food, fiber and fuel they produce, so shouldn't they also be compensated for providing ecological goods and services?

Wildlands, the forests, grasslands, wetlands, or shrublands that once ensured the availability of these ecological goods and services without any management have largely been converted to agricultural production. Croplands and pasture now occupies about 38% of Earth's Ice Free terrestrial surface and is by far the largest use of land. Farmers have become the managers of our global landscape and thus by default are responsible for producing far more than just food, fiber and fuel; they are also managing many of the ecological goods and services we need. Farmers are compensated for the food, fiber and fuel they produce, so shouldn't they also be compensated for providing ecological goods and services?

There is a long and well-intentioned history in North America to make food affordable for all. As a result Canadian's spend less of their household budget than nearly any other developed nation. Part of this is because farmers have done an amazing job of becoming more and more efficient but also because of advances in plant and animal genetics, fertilizers, pest control and irrigation. As a result over the past 50 years there has been a massive increase in food production and a long-term downward trend in real food prices globally. At the same time freshwater resources have been reduced or impaired, habitat has dwindled, soil has been degraded and greenhouse gases have begun to cause important changes in our global climate system, in part because of the way we have managed agricultural lands to maximize yields and minimize the cost of food. We cannot afford to continue this strategy. The cheap price of food may be killing us, but if the consumer already turns to the cheapest bag of potatoes on the shelf, how can we expect that they will pay more for these ecological externalities?

There is a growing recognition that ecological goods and services should be paid for, and there are now examples of Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) programs around the world largely paid for by governments, non-governmental institutions and investors who see a future value in these goods and services. Thus far PES programs have been relatively small in scale and focused on carbon sequestration, habitat for biodiversity or to protect water quality. The overall development of PES programs for agriculture has been impeded by the consumer and policy makers' lack of understanding of the relationship between farm management and the availability of ecological goods and services. This is partly because we need better science that can reliably quantify these services in a cost effective way and partly because we need to raise awareness. Having successful examples from pioneering programs such as Delta Farmland & Wildlife Trust is critical for illustrating to others how PES programs can be effective. Capturing and sharing what the real economics costs, the impacts on farm operations management practices and quantifying the multiple environmental impacts from projects like Grassland Set-asides and Hedgerows could play an importing role in promoting PES programs far beyond the Fraser delta.

If we want to ensure the availability of ecological goods and services such as clean water, habitat for wildlife including pollinators, the maintenance of soil quality and the mitigation of climate change, shouldn't that also be included in the price of food? If not, shouldn't we figure out some other way to pay for those services? If we do not incentivize farmers to cultivate ecological goods and services along with our food, where else are we going to get them?

UK Farmers visit Delta

A group of farmers touring from Herefordshire, UK, recently visited Delta farms. The UK farmers represented a diversified array of production systems including poultry, tree fruits, cereal grains, potatoes, and berries (mostly currants, but also strawberries and blueberries).

The UK farmers have access to habitat stewardship programs through **Natural England**. These programs are similar to those administered by DF&WT and are for establishing and maintaining habitat on countryside farms.

The programs target specific kinds of wildlife, such as breeding birds, amphibians, and pollinating insects using a variety of management actions , including the planting of winter seed mixtures for grassland birds, maintaining areas of weedy plants in grain stubble, establishing flowering nectar mixtures in field corners and margins, and growing plants that support invertebrates as feed for birds.

Also of interest was the provisioning of nesting sites for threatened birds species, such as the Skylark and Lapwing.

Lapwing

Photo by Natural England

Wildlife Tidbits *by John Hatfield*

Those of you that go hiking in the backcountry have probably come across discarded antlers at one time or another. The next time you see some take a closer look - it doesn't matter if they are deer, elk or moose antlers. The older they are the better chance of seeing "gnaw marks" which are caused by rodents, anything from mice to porcupines. They use these antlers to wear down their incisors as well as sharpening them for better cutting into woody vegetation. The antlers also provide minerals such as calcium that benefit the rodent's needs. This is definitely recycling of a natural product!

Overview of 2011 Stewardship Program Acreage

Grassland Set-aside:	**515 acres**
Winter Cover Crop:	**2,954 acres**
Total Hedgerow Length:	**8.5 km**
Total Grass Margin Length:	**4 km**
Laser Levelling:	**162 acres**
Lime Applied:	**680 tonnes**

Thank you to our co-operating farmers for conserving wildlife and stewarding the soil.

DF&WT wishes to acknowledge the significant funding support of the following organisations:

Delta Agricultural Society

Vancity

Ducks Unlimited Canada
Conserving Canada's Wetlands

HABITAT CONSERVATION TRUST FOUNDATION

BRITISH COLUMBIA WATERFOWL SOCIETY

Delta Farmland & Wildlife Trust

Directors

Mary Tait (*Chair*)
Martin Hamming (*Vice-Chair*)
Don Mark (*Treasurer*)
John Hatfield (*Secretary*)
Brent Harris
Anne Murray
Edward van Veenendaal
Jack Zellweger

Staff

Margaret Paterson
Office Coordinator

David Bradbeer
Program Coordinator

Farmland & Wildlife welcomes articles and letters. If you would like to contribute your agriculture-wildlife story, please let us know.

Electronic Newsletter... To help us conserve paper by receiving an electronic version of this newsletter, send an email to **dfwt@dccnet.com** with "**electronic newsletter**" in the subject line.

Make a donation towards farmland conservation today!

I would like to contribute $_____

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ Postal Code_____

Telephone_____

Mail cheques to:

Delta Farmland & Wildlife Trust
205 - 4882 Delta Street
Delta, B.C. V4K 2T8
or donate online at
www.deltafarmland.ca
ph: 604-940-3392

Delta Farmland & Wildlife Trust

Thank-you for your support!

Charitable Society Number
138397740 RR0001

Printed on 100% post consumer recycled waste