

# Take the plunge

Ready to rev up your farm business?  
Check out this special edition highlighting the  
Managing Excellence in Agriculture conference,  
Marketing Caravan and more!

## Canadian **farmmanager**

Canada's Bi-Monthly Farm Management Newsletter

Dec 2008/Jan 2009



Canadian Farm Business  
Management Council



## Stressed out on the farm?

It's a tough world out there.  
Which is why counsellor Pierrette  
Desrosiers, a farmer herself,  
is in such high demand. ▶11

# Not happy? Don't suffer, seek relief

**W**hen Pierrette Desrosiers first began speaking at farm conferences, organizers would never mention on the agenda that she is a clinical psychologist who deals with things such as stress, depression and divorce.

"Just the word 'stress' was very frightening to them," recalls Desrosiers. "They thought that farmers would not want to hear about this because admitting you are stressed is considered a sign of weakness."

But attitudes have changed greatly over the past decade, she says.

"Now, more and more producers want to hire me as a coach because they know this is what entrepreneurs in other sectors are doing," says Desrosiers. "They understand that if they can learn to better manage their time, better manage their stress, and improve their communication with both their employees and their families, they will have a more successful business and be happier in their personal life."

Desrosiers is in high demand today not just because she has a Masters degree in psychology but because she understands farming from the inside out. She was not only raised on a farm but still lives on one – her husband has a beef, cash crop and dairy operation in the Cantons de L'Est (Eastern Townships) region in Quebec's southeast corner. She spoke to *CFM* from her office in nearby St-Herménégilde.

**Q** *You work in the corporate world as well as with farmers. As people move up the corporate ladder – taking on new jobs and new roles – they know they have to change in order to succeed. Do farmers view things that way?*

**A** Change is always very, very difficult. I think most producers do not realize how many changes they have to make in order to succeed in their new kind of business. And when I say a new kind of business, I don't just mean if you change what you produce. If you go from 50 cows to having 250 cows, then you have a new kind of business. Today, many producers have much larger operations than before. They need to understand: You should not be the same manager as you were before, doing the same things you did before.

For example, many producers have said to me that they have undertaken huge expansions in recent years, but if they had known how difficult it is to manage people, they might not have done it. All of a sudden they are dealing with things such as an employee who is going through a divorce or is suffering from burnout, and they're saying, 'What am I supposed to do? How do I handle this?'

**Q** *And what do you tell them?*

**A** That is not an easy question to answer because it depends not only on the situation, but also on the producer. You know, someone might come to me and say, 'I really don't like managing people but I've grown

*my business and now I have six employees. I need to find a way to deal with this.'*

My response to that would be that you have to know who you are. Knowledge is very easy to acquire, but to change your behaviour and to acquire new competencies is very difficult. And you have to be realistic. If you are an introvert who is uncomfortable dealing with people and you find it hard to understand other people's emotions, then becoming a good manager of people is just too far a goal. That's just not part of your personality. And so it is not a good idea to create a business that depends on you successfully managing employees.

But many people can learn to be good managers of people by working on specific areas, such as communication. With training and coaching, you can learn to be a better communicator and that's a key step to becoming a good manager of people.

**Q** *How do you know what you can change and what you can't change?*

**A** This is a difficult question too, but a good one. I cannot take someone who is extremely introverted and make it so they just love managing people. There are some behaviours that are very difficult to change, but there are others that can be changed.

Many people who are in business suffer from stress or depression. Many also have panic attacks, waking up in the middle of the night because they fear something catastrophic is going to happen. These are behaviours that you can change. There are proven techniques and therapies which can alleviate and even cure these conditions.

**Q** *Do you have to have serious problems before you turn to someone like yourself?*

**A** Not at all and this is the big change I have seen since I started practising 10 years ago. So many farmers are feeling exhausted and overwhelmed, but more and more are looking to change this. They want to be happier, have better relations with their family, and not be so tired all the time.

My approach is always to say, 'How can your life be more balanced?' If all you do is work more hours all the time, you will reach the point where you accomplish less. When you are doing too much, you will be more irritable and more often in conflict, and you will not be able to think as clearly. So achieving the right balance is not only good for your personal life but for your business as well.

The best entrepreneurs and the best managers know themselves. If you don't know yourself, you will find yourself in a business that does not fit your values or your strengths and weaknesses. You have to build a business that will answer to who you are.



**Pierrette Desrosiers** is a prolific author and you can find many of her articles on [farmcentre.com](http://farmcentre.com) (Go to Today's Story, then click on the search function and type in her name). She will also be one of the featured speakers at the Managing Excellence in Agriculture 2009 conference.