

# Lambton Agricultural Hall of Fame Application for Bert Vandendool 2020

## 1. Contribution to Agricultural Community within Lambton County.

- a) Examples of involvement
- b) Impact of nominee on activities and success of various groups

Bert became involved in the Lambton County agricultural community shortly after his graduation from Ridgetown Agricultural College in 1960. One of the impacts that he brought to every County organization with whom he was engaged was the geographical representation of farmers in the southwestern portion of Lambton County. Distance from the central areas of the county where agricultural meetings were most often held meant that farmers from the Sombra area were not always well represented.

Bert always demonstrates a passion for working on issues and activities for the collective good. This differentiates his approach from some others who are focused primarily on advantages to their home farm operation.

Lambton Federation of Agriculture was one of the first organizations with whom Bert became involved. As a young farmer in a young organization, Bert had a special interest and made a strong contribution to a group that addressed a wide range of issues affecting many farmers.

Over his long farming career, Bert's strongest area of contribution was in organizations relating to the beef industry, particularly Lambton Cattlemen's Association. He was an active member, County Director, County President, as well as Provincial Director representing Lambton County on Ontario Cattlemen's Association. At the county level, Bert was actively engaged and showed leadership in many activities that paid practical dividends for beef producers within Lambton. Examples included herd health days, marketing initiatives, carcass competitions, red meat program, agriculture in the classroom, producer bus trips, and fundraising activities such as the annual beef barbecue.

Bert recognized the need for stable financing for beef producers to purchase feeder cattle. He knew that some producers were having challenges securing sufficient bank financing and felt if a cooperative group could be organized to build on the honesty and integrity of beef producers the group might be more successful in securing feeder cattle financing. He worked with determination to coordinate the efforts of producers, banks, and government to create the Lambton Feeder Finance Co-operative. This group was able to borrow substantial amounts of capital at preferred rates from banks with a partial guarantee from the Ontario government.

This allowed Lambton beef feeders to borrow from the cooperative based on their honesty, integrity, and production ability rather than their accumulated equity.

Bert was active in the early stages of the Lambton Soil and Crop Improvement Association. Working with some of the heavier clay soils that are typical of many parts of Lambton, Bert worked hard to promote and demonstrate the value of crop rotation, cropping integrated with livestock, soil conservation, and variety selection.

The Lambton Farm Safety Association of which Bert was a member promoted a constant awareness of safety on the modern and highly mechanized farm. Bert was especially cognizant of farm safety, raising his young family around an active feedlot and cropping enterprise.

Some of Bert's agriculture involvement was very local to his community including a series of winter meeting programs and kitchen meetings that he, his spouse Judy, and a few other couples in the community organized to satisfy the thirst for innovative agricultural and management knowledge in the days before the proliferation of the Internet.

Bert was one of the original members of the South Lambton Marketing Club that involved producers from a wide variety of commodities. That club provided practical experiences and educational activities that helped producers enhance the profitable marketing of the agricultural products from their farms.

## 2. Personal Development.

When we think of Bert many descriptors come to mind:

*Thinks of Others Before Himself:* Bert has been involved in many activities for the collective good! There are many examples including his beef industry activities and providing employment opportunities on his farm for individuals facing various challenges in their own life. Bert was always cognizant about maintaining the balance between time and energy spent on activities for the collective good with the time and energy required by his active farming operation and young family.

*Honesty and Integrity:* There are many examples in business and personal dealings in which Bert was engaged, especially with neighbours in his local community. Bert always prides himself in the fact that "his word is his bond."

*Visionary and Innovative:* In his farm business, organizational activity, and community action, Bert was always looking for innovative approaches to do things better, more effectively, or with greater positive impact.

*Trust:* Bert always trusts people whose ability he respects. He is quite willing to delegate responsibility to those individuals. He also recognizes trust is a two-way street and he must demonstrate trust in order to earn trust and respect in return.

*Sense of Humour:* Bert's wit, enthusiasm, and the "sparkle in his eye" help shape his ability to interact with others in many situations. It also allows him to diffuse some potential conflict in organizational activities.

*Personal Interaction and Engagement:* Bert has an uncanny ability to meet, greet and interact with individuals in a wide range of different situations. He has a knack of interviewing and sharing with individuals, where they end up enjoying the interview!

*Spirituality:* Bert's commitment to strong personal values and the values of his church community are evident throughout his business, organizational, and personal dealings.

### 3. Business Development.

Size, quality and innovative nature of home farm, business or activities.

Bert purchased his first farm in the early 1970s, after working with his father and brother on the farm on which they grew up. He established a beef feedlot that has been expanded over the years, including during the 2000's, with a current capacity of approximately 1000 head.

Various aspects of his operation show that Bert values the effective utilization of resources. He was into recycling before it became "in vogue". Examples of Bert's innovative nature include the rations for beef cattle in his feedlot. His proximity to a sweet corn processing plant provided a source for sweetcorn silage which he utilized for many years. Wet corn gluten, corn distillers' solubles and distillers' grain were three other feedstuffs that he used effectively along with home-grown crops with careful calculation as to how they fit into a balanced total mixed ration.

Bert's facilities captured some unique features including building a large bunker silo into the side of a hill to facilitate the required packing of the silage with a large tractor. Heavy industrial trusses and I-beams that originated in local industries were utilized in his feedlot expansions.

Bert's goal to create an operation that would appeal to future generations was achieved as Bert's son Derek and daughter-in-law Rachel and family currently own and operate the farm and feedlot.

#### 4. Contribution to Agricultural Community Outside Lambton County.

a) Examples of involvement

b) Impact of nominee on activities and success of various groups

Bert's greatest provincial impact resulted from his vision that started out meeting a basic need for financing for beef feeders in Lambton County. The success of the Lambton Feeder Finance Co-operative spread across Ontario. Now, over 30 years after Bert pioneered the first Feeder Finance Cooperative in Lambton County, there are currently 16 Feeder Finance Cooperatives in Ontario with over 800 members who last year borrowed over \$130 million to purchase feeder cattle. The same merits that Bert originally identified in Lambton have been realized by many beef producers across Ontario, especially those early in their farming career.

Bert was also a Provincial Director for 15 years (1984 to 1999) representing Lambton producers on the Ontario Cattlemen's Association. He was very active in this group as they addressed a wide range of issues that impacted beef feeders and cow-calf producers all across Ontario. He garnered the respect of beef producers from across the province with whom he worked.

Bert was also one of the original supporters and organizers of an educational program on beef production from Michigan State University that evolved into an annual series of educational seminars attended by beef producers from across Western Ontario.

#### 5. Contribution to Community Beyond Agriculture.

a) Examples of involvement

b) Impact of applicant on activities and success of various groups

Much of Bert's contribution to his community beyond agriculture relates to his church and interests of his growing family.

He was an active member of the Wallaceburg Christian Reformed Church serving several terms as an Elder, setting an example in providing spiritual support for the congregation. Bert served on the planning committee to evaluate whether to renovate the existing church or build new. Once the decision was made to build a new church, Bert was very active on the building

committee which culminated in a beautiful new church finished in 1998. It was built almost exclusively with volunteer labour from the parishioners. Bert was active in soliciting and motivating those volunteers to contribute in a meaningful way.

Bert also served on committees for the Wallaceburg Christian Reformed School to provide meaningful direction for his young family's education. This involvement continued with the Lambton Christian High School as his children progressed along their educational journey. He brought strong business and organizational knowledge to these groups along with a genuine interest in Christian education.

Bert and Judy also acted as volunteers for a youth drop-in centre (Cor 12) that appealed to disadvantaged youth in the Wallaceburg community. It provided the youth with an opportunity to interact with peers and mentors in a positive environment.

#### 6. Length of service to the agricultural community.

From graduation from Ridgetown College of Agriculture (1960) to present (2020) = 60 years

#### Summary

Bert Vandendool is a generous and honourable man who works for the collective good. He made an exemplary contribution to the agricultural community in Lambton County and if selected, would be a worthy member of the Lambton Agricultural Hall of Fame.