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Trade is my future



Mark Verkuyl: Trade is my future

For Mark Verkuyl, the pork business is all about family.

The third-generation pork producer runs Verkuyl Farms near Woodstock, Ontario, alongside his wife, Sara, his brother Ken and his wife Cindy, and his parents, Tony and Brenda. Mark and Sara also have three children, Eden, 9, Calvin, 6 and Wesley, just a year and a half old.

Currently they raise 1,100 sows from farrow to finish on 1,100 acres, based on the tradition established by Mark's father years ago.

"My dad has always done a nice job of being responsible in how he's raised his pigs and how he's taken care of his land," Mark says. "We work to continue that approach."

Using his father's example, Mark strives to sustain the family business for future generations. "It's a priority for us to have an efficient land base to produce feed for our pigs. Our pigs in return produce the nutrients required to nourish the crops," Mark says. "There's a viable and sustainable model for us, and here in southwestern Ontario it's something we care about."



Part of that approach includes seeing that pork produced on the farm maintains quality and responsible management throughout the entire production chain. Through a partnership with Conestoga Meats, a packing plant owned by 160 Ontario producers, Mark is able to ensure his standards are met through the stages of raising, processing and exporting his pigs.



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Mark and other partners have had the opportunity to host several international customers at Conestoga. These meetings offer the Canadian exporters the chance to appreciate the ways their buyers from other cultures do business and use their products.

"I've really valued the opportunity to meet with a couple of different Japanese companies who buy our products," Mark says. "The big takeaway for us has been their acknowledgment and discussion around the excellent quality of Canadian pork. We continue to strive to meet and exceed these levels of excellence, particularly in this market."

Because the Asian market in particular plays such a crucial role in Verkuyl Farms' success, access to world markets is imperative. Keeping market access open is of vital importance to the entire pork industry.

"We're always keeping our eye out for opportunities as they arise, whether it's expanding the business or making improvements to what we currently do," Mark says.

"We work together to guarantee a place for our pigs to end up that meets our standards of quality and responsible handling," Mark says. "Our involvement with Conestoga has allowed us to stay involved in our production, from the field all the way to the dinner table. We are involved at every step."

A key step in production for the Verkuyls is the export level—as Mark estimates that over half of his product is destined for overseas markets.

"Canadian pork in general is known worldwide for its quality," he says. "We are seen around the globe as producing high-quality, safe pork."



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