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Meet Markus Haerle

This Ontario soybean grower takes pride in customer satisfaction that hinges on world-class traceability.

Less than an hour by car from Ottawa, Ont., Chicken Little Farm is set in an area that shows passersby the clean and simple beauty of land farmed with pride. While the work of caring for the land is part of everyday practice on the farm, owner Markus Haerle is proud to put his farm land on display.

"I love to see nice crops being grown and the land being taken care of along the roadsides," he says. "Everything is well presented to the people who drive by. It's important for us to show how we do things in our daily work. We have to do our best to showcase our industry to everybody."

Near the community of St. Isidore, the Haerle family's mixed-farm operation grows small grains, oilseeds, corn, soybeans and spring wheat, in addition to gathering eggs from its lay-ing hens.

Markus operates the family-run business alongside his wife Roxane and his son Mathew. Meanwhile Markus's youngest son, Christopher, is about to graduate from high-school and also helps out full time on the farm. His daughters, Sabrina and Cassandra, are both college graduates.

With a large part of his business depending on export markets, he stays actively involved in keeping up with policy and regulations as well as being a voice for Canadian farmers.





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Among his numerous advocacy commitments, Markus has been a director for the Grain Farmers of Ontario (GFO) since 2010, and was elected vice chair of their board of directors in 2015. He represents GFO on the American Soybean Association, the Wheat Marketing Committee, the Ontario Agriculture Sustainability Coalition, the Risk Management Program Reference Committee, and most recently, the Barley Council of Canada. This work keeps him up to speed on arising issues and helps him stay informed on all sides of the industries he's involved with.

"Since I've been on the GFO board, I've been travelling to the U.S. to attend the Commodity Classic," he says. "This gives us a chance to meet up with our U.S. counterparts. We exchange information with the soybean board, the corn board, and the wheat growers to understand what American producers are working towards in the export markets and also what their challenges are. We are competitors, but at the end of the day, we should not be only that. We are better if we work together."

In addition to building opportunity in the U.S., Markus also traveled to Japan, Malaysia and Singapore as a member of the Canadian Soybean Exporters' Association in 2012.

"This is an ongoing government-led focus. Each year they bring a different farmer along to share our perspective to the buyers of soybeans," he says. "This trip gave me a great appreciation for what the buyers are looking for when they come to buy soybeans here in Canada."

This experience changed Markus's farming practices as he saw his customers' needs first hand. Because buyers are extremely particular in their desired specific Identity Preserved (IP) traits within each product, including genetically modified (GM) and non-GM varieties, keeping good records is essential. Being able to show the customer the practices and steps taken in producing the crop, showing stewardship of the soil, water, and air, and using proper storage facilities to reduce any potential of cross-contamination is vital to doing business.



"Meeting the customer really showed me the importance of doing my due diligence in these areas so I can present a quality product to the buyer," he says. "Those needs of the buyer really need to be respected. Once you lose that market, it's very difficult to get it back."

For Canadian farmers, the business of exporting requires a constant development of new markets and continued access to an immensely greater client-base — increased productivity and prosperity are key to a sustainable industry. Through Markus's trade experience, he has seen first-hand the respect that international customers have for Canadian growers.

"The buyers for our products are looking at farmers (who) invest every dollar we make back into our farms. It is absolutely a growing business and we're business people nowadays — not 'just' farmers."

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