

ACTIVITY REPORT 2019-2020



ENSEMBLE
POUR
ET FAIRE NOURRIR
GRANDIR L'OUTAOUAIS-
LAURENTIDES





Feeding Our People, More Than Ever Before

A year ago, I took on the role of President. It allowed me to realize how much men and women who support agriculture share my love of the land.

Because we love the earth, we ensure the sustainability of agriculture and land use in the area we live in. We pass it on to the next generation so that they keep harvesting. As we recognize how frail it is, we protect and respect it. We value the land and the fruits it bears. Our land provides identity and local colours that make us proud. This is how we express our love of the land.

Through our collective commitment and our participation in the democratic life of the UPA, we again bear witness to our attachment to the land.

Since March, I have seen men and women wracked with worry, fearing the impacts of the pandemic on their family business. If love can lift mountains, we find in our love of land the strength to meet the many challenges we are facing. Over the past few months, I have seen many actions undertaken by our local syndicates and the Federation to promote 'buy local' campaigns. I witnessed political initiatives and efforts to lessen the impacts of the pandemic on labour shortage, farm income, supply chain, and access to aid programs. In the background of all efforts, we improved operations and started reviewing our governance.

The UPA employees gave a tremendous boost to ensuring the continuity of services to producers by responding to their requests. For this, I am very grateful to them all.

Despite everything, we continue to live our commitment and our democratic life... from a distance! All this, out of love for the land and out of a duty to feed our communities.

I thank all those in the field who take their duties so seriously. In these difficult times, I wish they take good care of themselves, just as they tend to their fields and to their herds. Taking care of ourselves means allowing more than ever the accomplishment of our essential mission which is to nourish and help grow Outaouais-Laurentides.

Stéphane Alary
President

MESSAGE
FROM THE
PRESIDENT



Farmers – At the Heart of All Our Actions

More than fifty years ago, the farmers of our region chose to gather as a federation in order to grow together and provide services tailored to their needs. Over the past few months, I witnessed the importance of standing together, no matter how stormy it gets.

In this exceptional pandemic context, the Federation has been a source of resilience nourished by the unwavering involvement of our directors and employees who were united in the common concern of serving farmers.

I bow before the perseverance of our elected representatives who have maintained a strong collective commitment despite the incredible challenges inherent to the crisis. Their unwavering will to redefine the organization with heart and conviction commands the utmost respect.

I also want to underline the tenacity of my team in ensuring quality service and to setting out tangible objectives for them to achieve. Since March, this team has steadfastly stayed the course on its desire to respond as best as they possibly can to the needs of producers despite the upheavals.

I am proud of our dynamic democratic life. Its strength was demonstrated in moments such as the propane crisis, as well as in fundamental issues such as hay insurance program, drought and lack of slaughtering capacity. In all of these, we clearly expressed our leadership.

I am proud of how we overcame the human resources challenge in recruiting and training several new employees since August 2019. Today, our team of employees is well-established and fully empowered to meet any challenges.

I am proud of our Agricultural Employment Centre, which has been evolving in the eye of the COVID-19 storm since March, while continuing to develop expertise that forges its reputation and elevates its recognition beyond our region.

With the collaboration of its employees, the SCF Service has begun a new chapter in its development, articulated via a 2020-2023 action plan that will contribute to its business positioning.

In these times, as the notion of being a federated organization takes on its full meaning, I praise the courage behind these achievements. The producers and employees who keep our Federation alive have shown their determination and have seized the opportunities before them to accomplish our mission, which is today more important than ever: Serving our producers.

Nathalie Messias
Regional Director

MESSAGE FROM THE REGIONAL DIRECTOR



A TRANSITION YEAR

Both in terms of day-to-day operations and services to producers, the past year was a transition one. Newcomers to the presidency, to the executive committee, to the board of directors and to the regional management, inevitably inspired the organization with a new style. A new chapter has begun.

Amongst our democratic entities, the directors asserted their willingness to question themselves, to take their place, and to develop a *modus operandi* on working through committees.

Last January, a first milestone was set when the elected officials reflected on their role and responsibilities from which resulted the implementation of new governance that will allow the organization to better face the growing challenges. The development of work plans, a new policy for welcoming new producers, and a communication plan were given highest priority. Actions were rapidly undertaken to achieve these goals such as a reference guidebook on governance, the redesign of several committees and the implementation of a finance committee.

The redesign of the Land Use Planning Committee is a concrete illustration of this willingness to act differently. Its new structure, ensuring regional representation and a new participatory mode of operation, will now allow for more effective and targeted response.

Operationally, action plans for all departments are being implemented. The reviewing of work processes is underway.

The Federation is undergoing significant changes. It is a work-in-progress that will be continued over the coming year.



NO TIME TO REST FOR DEMOCRATIC LIFE



For the past several months, COVID-19 has taken up a lot of space in our lives. In the following pages, we highlight the many actions and achievements guided under the Federation's leadership and overshadowed by this pandemic.

The Propane Crisis

On Tuesday, November 19, 2019, Canadian National employees called a strike which had an immediate impact on propane deliveries to producers in the middle of the corn drying season.

The event prompted a whirlwind of coordination of a demonstration scheduled for the following Monday in Montreal. Telephone chain, bus reservations, placards drawing, the entire crew of employees were hands-on while several producers were active in the field and interviewed by media.

On November 25th, some fifty farmers from the area, accompanied by a dozen tractors, joined the demonstration that brought together some 250 people in front of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Montreal office. Speed, solidarity, and visibility were the key ingredients that put pressure for a quick settlement. An agreement was finally reached between CN and its employees the day after.



Lieutenant Governor's Medal for Marcel Denis

Leading the handover of farmland for Mirabel airport earned Marcel Denis, President of the UPA Sainte-Scholastique-Mirabel, the honour of receiving the Lieutenant Governor's Medal, the highest Quebec recognition for volunteer involvement.

As fate would have it, this fight of a lifetime was highlighted during the time of confinement, depriving Mr. Denis and his relatives of the traditional ceremony coming along with the recognition. He deserves the warmest congratulations for his tenacity and for being such a source of inspiration to many, which brings pride to our organization in which he has been involved for more than 34 years.



Union Award to UPA Basses-Laurentides

On December 4, 2019, *L'Escouade des fermiers en ville* (A Flock of Farmers in Town) was granted the Prix de la Valorisation Laurent-Barré, a recognition award for agriculture valorization initiatives. This program intended to day camp leaders offers training on agricultural and agri-food topics. Launched in Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines in 2018, 'L'Escouade' descended upon six other municipalities in the summer of 2019.

This project, lead by Isabelle Hardy and supported by Syndicat de l'UPA des Basses Laurentides, also involved two other members of the board of directors, Audrey Lemaire (President) and France Majeau (Director).





Mental Health

TALK TO ME...

Along with Écoute agricole des Laurentides (ÉAL), *Parle-moi...* (Talk to me...) is a campaign launched during National Suicide Prevention Week in February. Three videos gathering the testimonials of two farmers and the daughter of a late farmer who experienced mental distress were produced and broadcast in social media.

The campaign intended to capture the attention and raise awareness on the importance of breaking silence and isolation that aggravate mental stress in agriculture.

On Facebook, the campaign put forward with ÉAL generated an unprecedented activity since the creation of the Federation's page in 2014, with 97.3K people reached, 45.9K views, and 2,387 interactions, including 749 shares.

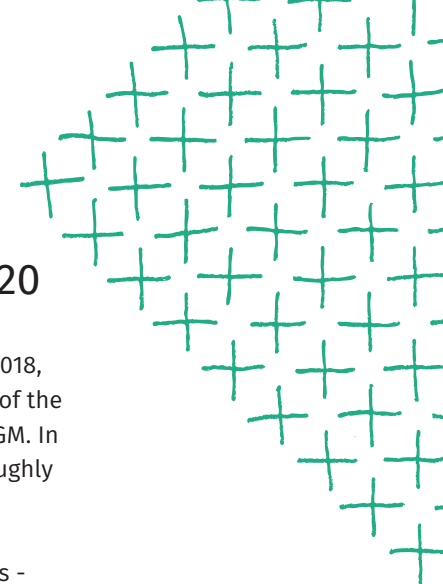
Talk to me... was also covered in a dozen media, including TVA and La Tribune.

FARMER WELLNESS WORKERS FOR THE OUTAOUAIS

In 2019, four Outaouais farmers committed suicide in a span of four months. Such statistics demonstrate the urgency of offering a front-line support service similar to what is offered in the Laurentides.

The UPA and Écoute agricole des Laurentides (ÉAL) worked together to raise necessary funding to hire two farmer wellness workers for the Outaouais area. Thanks to the financial contribution of the four Outaouais UPA local syndicates and local partners, the funding for the project is practically finalized and ÉAL is planning to recruit this fall.





The Hay Issue and Drought Operation 2020

Scorched by the difficult seasons of 2017 and 2018, several farmers pointed out the shortcomings of the hay crop insurance program during the 2019 AGM. In the following months, this situation was thoroughly documented by the Federation staff.

Information collected came from 120 producers - 30% of the region's insured producers. It led to the conclusion the exercise was worthwhile. Analysis of the data highlighted a problem with the recording of frost by the Mirabel weather station.

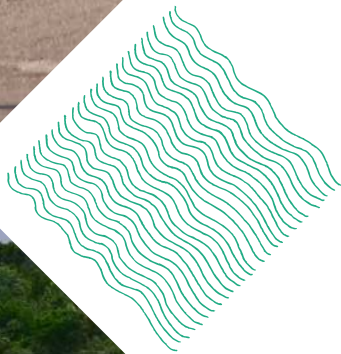
Providing the UPA Confederation with this analysis, we succeeded in obtaining compensation for those farmers. Our leadership allowed us to further play a key role in the coordination of the UPA's provincial Drought Operation 2020.





Welcoming New Producers

It is proven; a new producer who receives a warm welcome from their peers has better understanding of the organization and shows increased interest and involvement. As a result of rigorous work on the part of the Democratic Life and Communications Committee, a new standardized policy for welcoming new farmers is now effective. Going forward, each local syndicate has designated welcoming representatives who will receive training and necessary documentation. Each newcomer to agriculture and the Union will be welcomed by another producer through a virtual visit or in person.



Lack of Slaughtering Capacity

In the midst of the Covid-19 crisis, some farmers complained their slaughtering contracts were cancelled or got no access to a slaughter house. A survey was sent to 670 stock breeders, from which 100 responses were received. Interviews were conducted. They all shed light on a major issue many small livestock producers are facing. While Mangeons local (Eat Local) is on everyone's lips, this unfortunate situation endangers processing, marketing, and purchasing of local meats.

Our analysis was shared with the provincial UPA Agricultural Research and Policy Department and constitutes a factual basis for making specific representations to the Ministry of Agriculture.

COVID-19 OR TAKING THE BULL BY THE HORNS

A Team Challenge

Providing services to producers while adapting to the exceptional situation created by COVID-19 in a sector as critical as agriculture was quite a feat, particularly since this situation was imposed literally overnight.

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization officially declared the existence of a pandemic. Crisis management then became the bread and butter of our operations for the weeks to follow. All along the chain of action, we had to adapt while keeping in mind the ultimate goal of maintaining essential services to producers.

Nothing was trivial, from the logistics surrounding compliance with health directives in the workplace to the hunt for disinfectant gel. The crisis also posed financial risks for the organization. Unfortunately, temporary layoffs had to be made, as elsewhere in Longueuil and regional federations.

It became mandatory to ensure coherence in the team's work, partially teleworking, while supporting, from a distance, democratic life of elected representatives.

In order to maintain a close link with employees, directors, members, and the public, internal and external communications became a key issue. Continuous contact was maintained with the UPA Confederation, which carries out political representations with outcomes for producers in all regions.

The challenge of technological limitations (high-speed internet access in rural areas as well as varying technical skills amongst different people) was very real, but something we were able to overcome at a surprising rate as the months passed.

Seven months later, we are entering a 'new normal' where our ways of doing things have clearly evolved, perhaps permanently. The progress made in such a short time is impressive and our success deserves to be highlighted!





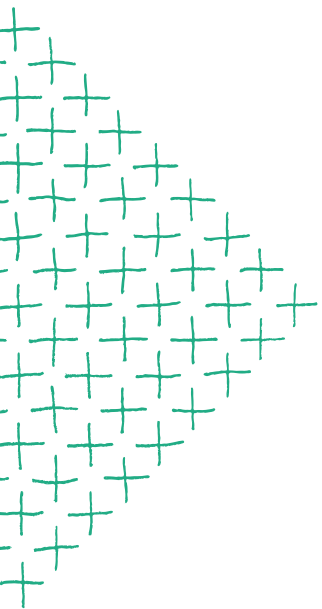
An Organization in Action

Communicating with members, elected officials, employees, as well as with the general public, quickly became the focal point of the matter. A new section dedicated to COVID-19 was created on our website and continuously updated. Subscription to the newsletter was promoted amongst members and partners, and its readership increased along with its frequency. Meanwhile, our Facebook page was used to relay last-minute developments.

The crisis created an opportunity for engaging and consulting with partners. The MRCs have become allies to facilitate and promote 'buy local' initiatives. Under the Federations' leadership, a UPA/ MAPAQ / Financière Agricole regional committee was created to quickly address issues as they arose.

At the forefront of the daily reality, the local syndicates quickly identified labour shortage, business income, marketing and supply chain issues, travel between territories, and mental health as priorities of action. For instance, a follow-up was done with producers in Deux-Montagnes and Argenteuil in order to collect missing email addresses which are mandatory to maintain remote contact. In Laval, the local syndicate, along with the City Economic Development Representative, played a key role in recognition of ornamental horticulture as an essential service.

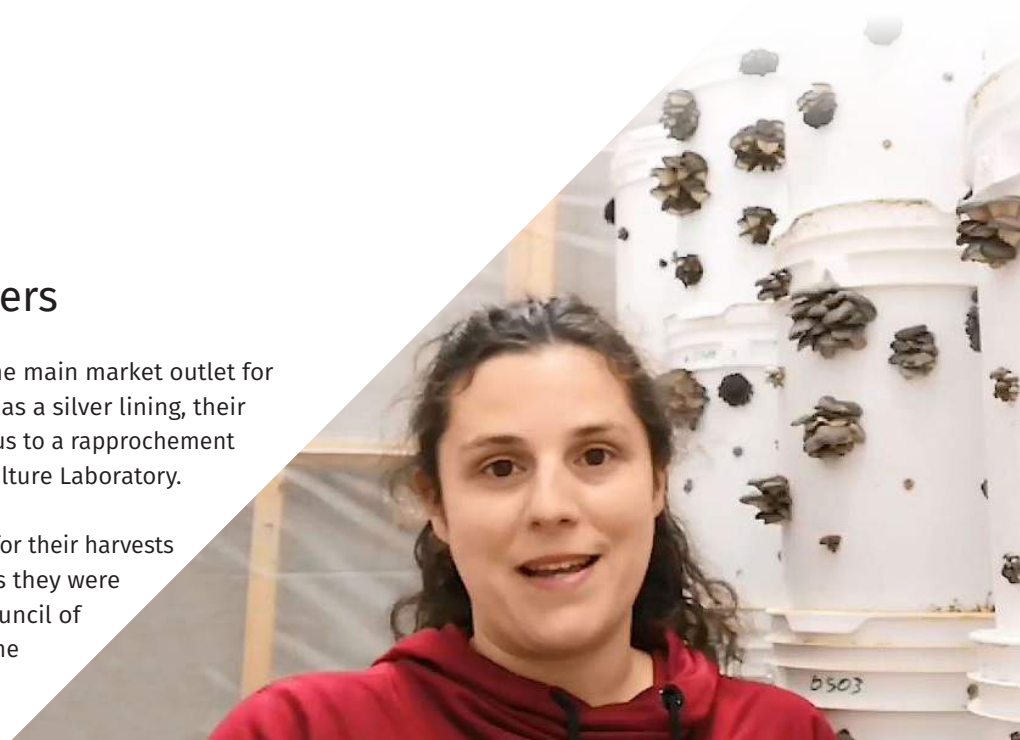




Reaching Out to Urban Farmers

Restaurants being closed, the lockdown cut off the main market outlet for numerous urban farmers. But since every cloud has a silver lining, their request for help gave the Federation a fresh impetus to a rapprochement initiated a few years ago through the Urban Agriculture Laboratory.

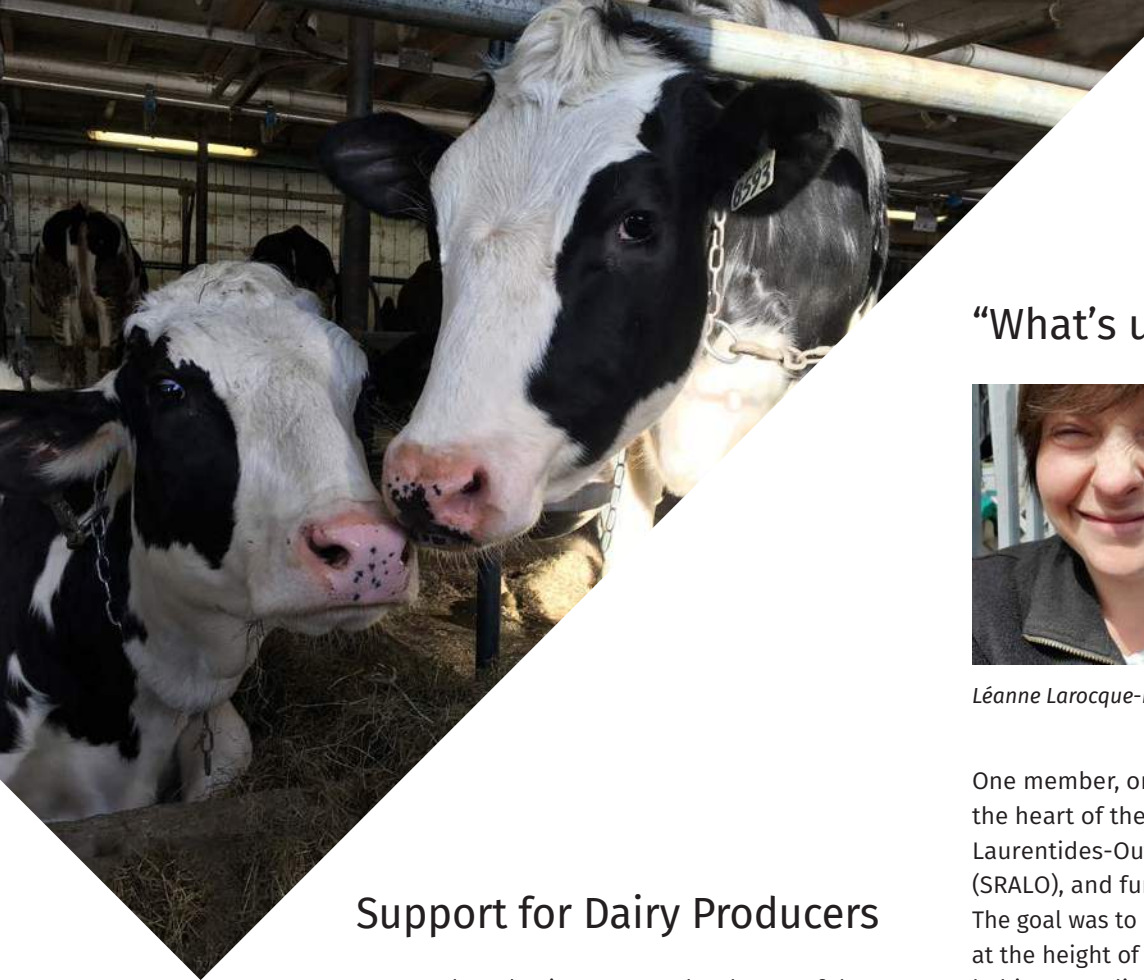
They challenged lack of new distribution channels for their harvests as well as access to financial assistance programs they were unaware of. In collaboration with the Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors and La Financière agricole, the Federation was able to facilitate contacts with potential distributors and provide urban producers with information on financial aid programs they are entitled to.



Dominique Lynch Gauthier, Blanc de gris



Guillaume Salvas, Ôplant



Support for Dairy Producers

In several production sectors, the closure of the HRI market (hotels, restaurants and institutions) caused losses. For milk producers, they were up to 30% of the dairy market. The Outaouais-Laurentides region was particularly impacted by this situation. In order to dispose of milk surpluses, millions of litres of milk were donated to food banks. Directors and employees of the Dairy Farmers Regional Council mobilized to support producers and find solutions for the disposal of unsold milk.

“What’s up?”



Léanne Larocque-Bordeleau, Tommy Lauzon and Christelle Brassard, of the SRALO

One member, one phone call. This principle is at the heart of the campaign initiated in April by the Laurentides-Outaouais young farmers syndicate (SRALO), and further taken up across the province. The goal was to break the isolation of young producers at the height of the lockdown as public consumption habits were disrupted, and uncertainty about the arrival of foreign workers was front and centre.

The calls made it possible to lend an ear to 58 young farmers (72% of the syndicate’s membership) about their concerns, and then relay them to concerned ministries and specialized syndicates. The operation reached 513 young farmers throughout the province.



Eating Locally

From the first days of confinement, the Federation promoted the Solution locale online sales directory so that farmers could sign up. The effort was carried out in concert with MRCs and agri-food roundtables.

The table was set for the Mangeons local plus que jamais (Eating Locally More Than Ever) campaign, launched by the UPA last spring. Eight local farmers responded to an invitation to produce an in-house video on this theme. It represents one of the most important regional contributions to the campaign, leading to the dissemination of some 50 producer testimonials across the province.

Meanwhile, 23 farmers from Outaouais, Laurentides, Laval, and Montreal collaborated on the creation of a collective video coordinated and broadcast by the Federation. Word games in both languages along with a chain of sentences resulted in a mosaic of everyday moments on our farms and showed the liveliness and the various faces of agriculture when pandemic was at its peak.

Activity on the Federation's Facebook page jumped, with 46.4K people reached 21.6K views, and 1,484 interactions, including 362 shares.



AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYMENT CENTER (CEA)

In the Eye of the Storm

The CEA has literally been in the eye of the COVID-19 storm since March 2020. The situation gave rise to an unprecedented volume of cases to be processed and required extraordinary adaptability on the part of the department staff.

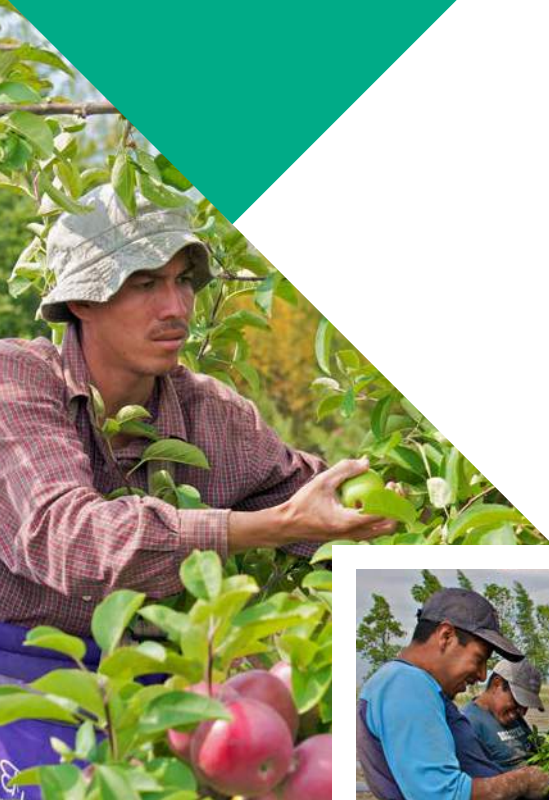
The border closure, the delayed arrival of temporary foreign workers (TFWs), shifting health directives for enterprises, and government decrees on essential services required many hours of accompaniment and support to producers who were often anxious and overwhelmed.

Acute Labour Shortages

While in normal times farmers were already set up in early spring with TFWs for their operations, this year, the CEA was called upon to play a key role in providing front-line service throughout the season in order to manage the numerous extensions of stay and transfers of workers from one farm to another or even from one region to another; all this while starting to process TFW applications for 2021.

The CEA has played an active role in tackling the labour shortage by participating in the development of information, promotion and support tools for employees and farmers as part of the *J'y vais sur-le-champ* (I'm Going to Work in the Fields) provincial campaign for reaching out to the local workforce.

The team responded creatively to these new recruiting imperatives as they arose, giving meaning to the saying 'building an airplane in mid-air'.





New Ways of Recruiting

The recurring challenge of recruiting labour on farms inspired the CEA to draft a promising strategy for recruiting agricultural labour from amongst seniors and young retirees. The initiative led to the development of new partnerships. A promotional campaign targeting new clients is in the works for next year.

Human Resources Management

In February the CEA showcased its expertise in human resources management by organizing a one-day conference on this theme. Featured speaker Carol Allain discussed the topic of stress and occupational health.



The CEA team

*Suzanne Laplante,
respondant in training, Outaouais*



*Frédérique Proulx, respondant in training,
Montreal, Laval, Laurentides*



Training Collectives Renewal

The increasing interest in distance learning has offered a development opportunity for the two regional Training Collectives, as online learning is becoming mean stream. Winds of change are also blowing in Outaouais with a new respondent and a renewed board of directors. Desire is to refocus efforts on specific training needs in collaboration with our local syndicates.



ACCOUNTING & INCOME TAX SERVICES (SCF DEPARTMENT)

On the Way Towards Integrated & Optimized Services

On October 3, 2019, SCF Conseils, a professional services cooperative was born. The creation of this social enterprise was part of the process of integrating services into a new provincial cooperative. This approach allows for personnel and expertise in all regions to be pooled together in order to standardize and improve services.

A brand image and a concerted communication strategy will allow for increased recognition and advantageous business positioning in the agriculture field. This project will be rolled out gradually over the next few years.

At the same time, a restructuring exercise was carried out, and a 2020-2024 action plan is on track. These transformations open a new chapter in the development of the Accounting and Income Tax Department with work processes optimization and service development.



*Sylvie Allaire,
Management Consultant*

A Lighthouse in a Sea of Information

While many farmer assistance programs were being put forward by the federal and provincial governments, SCF set up a designated resource to support farmers in a sea of information. Sylvie Allaire, Management Consultant, offered her valuable insight on the many programs and lead them through steps required to access them.

Serving Clients During Times of Pandemic

Creativity, responsiveness, continuity: These words aptly describe the SCF's ability to adapt quickly to a new environment and to maintain client services at a critical juncture during tax season. Maintaining a close relationship with clients while completing a case load on time in a social distancing context was challenging. A contactless document filing procedure, a reorganization of employees' work between office and teleworking, and a good dose of coping skills made it possible to meet expectations and deadlines of an extraordinary income tax season.



New Blood in the Team

Since 2019, many employees have joined the 15, chemin Grande-Côte. Some arrived in the midst of the pandemic as others have been with the UPA for several months or even years, but recently took up new positions. This is a great opportunity to wish them all the best in their new endeavour.



Andrée Girard
Office Clerk



Johanne Chalifoux
Secretary to
Réseau Agriconseils,
Management Consultants
& Tax Specialist



Julie Beaudin
Accounting Technician,
SCF



Manon Lessard
Accounting Technician,
SCF



Daniela De Rezende
Accounting Technician,
Administrative Services



Samuel Côté
Accountant, CPA



Marie-Claude Boucher
Accounting Technician,
SCF



Benoît Fullum
Tax Specialist since 2019,
employed since 2002



Sylvie Allaire
Agronomist
& Management Consultant



Sarah Lafrance
Accountant since 2020,
employed since 2015



Line Rioux
Payroll Support

Fédération UPA Outaouais-Laurentides

15, chemin de la Grande-Côte, bureau 200
Saint-Eustache (Québec) J7P 5L3



POUVOIR NOURRIR
POUVOIR GRANDIR

Outaouais-Laurentides