



DARREN HULL



# farmer

IN THE


# ELLE



Meet 3 amazing women who are changing the agriculture of Canada.

**IT'S TRUE NOT EVERY LITTLE GIRL GROWS UP WANTING TO BE A FARMER,** but more do than ever before. According to a 2011 census, 27.5 percent of farm operators in Canada are female. That's just over 80,500 Canadians—and the percentage is growing.

Even women from non-farm families are hearing and heeding the call to own, till, and reap their own patch of land. These agriculturalists are not to be underestimated: they're some of the most ambitious, inspiring and down-to-earth, women you'll meet. Best Health caught up with three of them; here are their stories.



by LESLEY YOUNG

## THE DAIRY FARMER

**A**S THE OLDEST OF THREE GIRLS, KIM Waalderbos used to trail her father around their Nova Scotia dairy farm helping out with chores. He always told her there wasn't anything girls couldn't do, and sure enough, she would figure out ways to outsmart situations she couldn't outmuscle. "Only now, later in life, can I see all the learning I got back then, primarily in work ethic," says Waalderbos, 31. "We lived 10 minutes from the ocean and I'd have to watch my friends walk by to the beach while I had to stay and finish chores."

While dairy farming was in her blood, Waalderbos kept her options open at university where she studied agriculture.

"The communication and business side of farming really interested me, too.

Everyone is so far removed from where food comes from." She met and fell in love with her current boyfriend David deVries, and together they worked other jobs to raise enough capital to buy their first dairy farm three years ago. Today, they manage a barn of 100 dairy animals on over 200 acres of land 45 minutes north of Fredericton, NB.

Waalderbos calls her cows divas because they are treated like royalty. The barn is free-stall, so the cows go wherever they want. They each wear a collar that can monitor their feed intake so they can nibble at grain dispensers leisurely. They sleep on human mattresses and get regular "pedicures." Waalderbos has multiple apps on her phone to measure everything, even manure loads. Her investment in technology goes back to her business philosophy— the happier the animal, the better the quality of milk, the more the farm will thrive.

Her commitment to business goals means the couple achieved most of their five-year plan within two years. And just this past Christmas, David's been able to come to work full-time at the farm alongside Waalderbos, though she still works at another job 15 to 20 hours weekly – for now. "As a farmer, you really get to push yourself. It's about being a self-starter," she says. "Combine that with a passion for producing great quality product, and it's very satisfying."



## THE FRUIT FARMER

**I**N 2007, JENNAY OLIVER, THE OUT-GOING fourth-generation farmer who grew up tending to fruit trees and working a busy summer fruit stand just outside Kelowna, BC, was living in Vancouver and going to school to become an aircraft maintenance engineer. Then, suddenly, Oliver became the most likely heir to the 15-acre u-pick fruit farm and stand, featuring cherries, apricots, peaches, plums, apple and pear trees, and she had a big decision to make.



"I could say no, and do my own thing, or I could take over and keep the farm growing," says Oliver, who was genuinely torn. Having grown up on the fruit farm, she knew what kind of lifestyle she would be taking on.

Fast-forward eight years, and Oliver lives in the home her mother grew up in, with her 95-grandmother — who founded the fruit stand back in 1951 — upstairs. In mid-November post harvest, she takes advantage of the slower time of year, working as a volunteer firefighter and running in the early mornings, just to get a few quiet moments to herself.

Because, from late spring through early fall, Oliver works anywhere from 10 to 16 hour days, overseeing 25 employees while helping out with picking and managing the market, which operates daily. She barely has to time to scoot into the city of Kelowna, just a 15-minute drive, to pick up farm supplies. "I get a lot of calls from friends in November asking how the season went. I'm lucky they are okay with that, and know better than to invite me anywhere." She also has the support of her boyfriend (who is a pilot, but grew up on a farm and knows how to operate a tractor).

Oliver's been riding a tidal wave of increasing consumer demand for locally grown produce, which has tripled the farm's gross sales since she took over. Last year she also made right on her own dream to transform the farm into a destination by adding an ice cream parlour and selling locally grown preserves and honey. "Now instead of coming and buying fruit and leaving, visitors can also sit down and relax in the orchards." Oliver added a coffee bar last spring.

"I couldn't do what I do without the help of my family," says Oliver. Luckily, most of her family, including her parents, all live on nearby farms. Naturally, the Sunday brunches and pizza nights are abundant with farm-talk and tips. "I never feel alone. If I have a problem there is always someone with more experience than me that I can check with."

## THE MEAT FARMER

**I** IN HER LATE TEENS AND EARLY 20S, Tarrah Young identified herself as an environmentalist. However, it wasn't until her last semester working on a degree in environmental biology at the University of Guelph that she found her calling. "I took an organic agriculture course and I had an epiphany."

Young, 38 was determined to show naysayers, including her family (at first), that farming can be a profitable livelihood. "It is true that farming is hard. And despite what some think, you can make a good living doing it. But for me, it was really about having a viable business and making a positive impact on the environment through farming." To gain experience, she took a farming internship where she met her future husband, Nathan Carey, and together they built a business plan to help make Young's dream come true.

She didn't want to have to cut production costs at the expense of protecting the environment and the dignity of her animals. "So I decided I would sell directly to consumers online, and set my own price at what it costs to produce." Young and Carey stuck to their vision and eventually bought 50 acres just east of Neustadt, Ontario.

Eight years later, Green Being Farm is thriving. However, the workload has been tremendous. Young can work 10- to 12-hour days during the week, raising animals outdoors, on pasture, with the highest regard for their needs and impact on the environment. The menagerie includes Berkshire pigs, Katahdin sheep, heritage hens, and Red Poll cattle. They also run a winter CSA (community-supported agriculture) program where people who live nearby pay a fee in advance to ensure a bi-weekly allotment of locally and organically grown vegetables.

"I thought I would love the physical part of farming, finding the best ways to grow and harvest. But I love the

business side of things just as much," says Young. Meeting people, and making connections with those who eat her food is "like receiving an emotional paycheck," she explains. "I love farming...well, maybe not every minute. But farming is tired parenting. There are lots of times when you are tired and it's hard, but you love it more than anything." ❧

