



# Enterprising Rural Families™

This newsletter is an instrument of the *Enterprising Rural Families: Making It Work* program of the University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service. For further information concerning the Enterprising Rural Families program or on-line course contact [information@eRuralFamilies.org](mailto:information@eRuralFamilies.org) or go to <http://eRuralFamilies.org/>.

## TIP OF THE MONTH:

### Family Financial Objectives

Each family must set their own specific goals, depending upon where they are in their life cycle. However, five basic financial objectives apply to most families:

1. Protect yourself against risk in two ways: by setting up emergency funds, and by purchasing an adequate mix of insurance that will cover life, disability, health, property and casualty, and automobile.
2. Provide for financial security of yourself and your family by providing for education of family members, purchase of home, cars, and other basic needs. Provide adequate financial security without placing undue stress on your resources to cause financial crisis.
3. Have a comfortable standard of living that goes beyond the financial security provided for in objective #2.
4. Provide for a financially independent, comfortable retirement during your later years that will provide the same standard of living that you enjoyed during your working years.
5. Provide for an orderly transition and distribution of your assets and wealth. This objective is usually called "estate planning" and should be an important objective whether you have accumulated a large estate or not.

From *The Life Cycle of Financial Planning* by Gail M. Gordon.

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## Giving the kids their turn

By Glenn Cheater, the Canadian Farm Manager  
Courtesy of [www.farmcentre.com](http://www.farmcentre.com)

See the Blackburn's web site at [www.fromagerieblackburn.com](http://www.fromagerieblackburn.com)



*Photo by The Blackburn's (from left to right): Nicolas, Marie-Josée, Gilles, Benoit, Michaël, & Jean-François)*

Alain, Benoit and Gilles Blackburn took over the family farm in 1978 and promptly made some radical changes that increased the number of grey hairs on the head of their father Joseph.

"I think the two first years were the hardest of his life," Gilles recalls with a laugh.

"He couldn't believe the speed at which we were going and where we were going. There was a generation's difference (in attitude)."

Three decades later, the children of Benoit and Gilles would get their turn – and they, too, had some surprises in store for the older generation.

But the story of Ferme A.B.G Blackburn inc. demonstrates how you can revitalize a farm by giving young people a chance to pursue their passions. It's not always an easy process but it's not supposed to be. Change, after all, comes with a price.

The farm was founded by Joseph's father, Napoléon, who arrived in Québec's Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean region in 1926 and carved his small holding out of the bush with nothing but hand tools, sweat, and toil. An



only child, Joseph fathered 14 children, and all of them helped raise pigs, chickens, sheep and cows, along with the vegetables they sold in the nearby city of Jonquière. Joseph was 46 before he was given ownership of the farm but only a decade later, he decided to sell it to three of his boys, all still in their early to mid 20s.

Joseph had greatly expanded the farm, but his energetic and ambitious young sons had even grander plans. They immediately bought a neighbouring farm (the first of seven farms they would take over), part of an aggressive expansion that would see the dairy herd grow to 280 cows.

After transferring ownership, Joseph stayed on to help his three sons on the farm. So he had a ringside seat from which to view all the changes. Even though he soon decided the boys knew what they were doing, it was still nerve-wracking.

“For example, as the years went by, we went from dry hay to silage,” says Gilles, now 58. “In 1983, we invested \$300,000 for hay equipment for silage and to buy silos. He didn’t understand because he had always paid cash, and now we were taking loans. But eventually he understood that this was the road we had to take, (and) he got on board with us.”

Flash forward to 2005: Alain has just retired and a new generation has been welcomed into the business – not as future owners, but as shareholders, each with a 20-per-cent stake. At the time, Gilles’ son Jean-François was 24, his brother Nicolas 22, sister Marie-Josée just 20, and Benoit’s son Michaël 21.

And, quelle surprise, the kids – just like their dads – wanted to transform the farm once again. Their vision was centred around cheese-making. Both dads were comfortable with the concept of creating Fromagerie Blackburn. Decades of selling vegetables through the on-farm kiosk had taught them about selling direct to the consumer, and the artisanal and local food movements were growing stronger every year.

But Jean-François had an idea that caught his father and uncle completely off guard. One of the challenges of cheese production is dealing with the vast amounts of white water and lactoserum (whey) – substances deemed to be effluent under environmental regulations. Whey can be used in pig feed but Blackburn wasn’t paid for it (and actually had to pay the trucking costs) and white water requires costly treatment before it can be disposed of. However, Jean-François (who studied administration in university but has a love for all things mechanical) had learned that a few cheese-makers in Europe were using a process called methanation to convert white water and whey to a biogas, and then burning the gas to create the hot water required for cheese making.

This sort of environmentally friendly and cutting-edge technology was very exciting – for the kids. No so much for their fathers, especially since the methanation system would cost well over \$350,000.

“The worst of it was that we were getting involved with a new technology that was not in use in Canada,” says Gilles.

“Investing \$350,000 without knowing the results at the other end is not easy. I didn’t know anything about this technology at first, so I had some catching up to do. That’s how it goes, but it wasn’t easy to accept at first. Afterwards, we’re proud of it and we’re happy about it, but it wasn’t easy.”

The speed of change was another factor – the biogas plant (successfully) went into operation in June 2007, just nine months after the launch of Fromagerie Blackburn ([fromagerieblackburn.com](http://fromagerieblackburn.com)). (The system can handle nearly two million litres of ‘effluent’ and generates 170,000 kilowatt-hours of energy annually.)

This initiative shows how the farm now operates. Each partner has a speciality: Jean-François is the chief mechanic, Marie-Josée a cheesemaker, Michaël does herd management, and Nicolas divides his time between cheese making, market gardening and overseeing the biogas system. But the overall management is a team process. Everyone not only has a right to speak his or her mind during management meetings, but is expected to voice an opinion. And they know their father and uncle will not only listen, but listen with respect.

“Before age 30 is the best time to get children involved,” says Gilles. “At that age, all the ideas are flowing. And the passion. Of course at first, it’s not easy. But children are the future and when you believe in them, age does not matter. When I see people wait until their child is 40 before they turn over the farm, I think that’s deplorable. They have missed the boat.”

The fact that the kids don’t think like their parents and want to try new things isn’t a problem, says Gilles, it’s the best part.

“Both my brother and I now have more energy for the business because it is very stimulating,” says Gilles. “My friends down at the curling rink say, ‘Gilles, when are you going to retire?’ and I say, ‘I’m not going to. This is what I want to do.’”

The Canadian Farm Manager newsletter is published every two months. You can sign up for free by going to <http://www.farmcentre.com/News/CFMNewsletter/> and following the links.



The Blackburn's. One enterprising family!



**Encourage the young people  
in your family in their business endeavors.  
They could be the next generation to take  
over the family business!**



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