



# Getting to Know the Farmer

**Grade Level:** all

**Objectives:** to learn about a Saskatchewan farm family, the history of their farm and the value they bring to our homes and our province

**Materials:** story of The Medernach Family Farm

**Time Allotment:** 30 minutes

**Advance Preparation:** prepare a set of questions (or use the ones below) based on the Medernach's' family farm history for the students to answer

**Laying the Groundwork:** Around the time of settlement in the early 1900's there were approximately 40,468 hectares (100,000 acres) of vegetables grown in Saskatchewan, almost all in home gardens. Most homeowners had a garden and relied on that garden for fresh produce during the growing season, and stored vegetables in root cellars for winter months. As people moved into towns they began to rely on those still on the farms to provide them with their food. A farmer *was* the agricultural or food system – or at least the largest part of it – doing nearly everything on the farm. From saving seeds from one year to plant crops the next, raising animals, and growing the food needed to sustain their families, animals and communities, the family farm was the centre. Food was stored at the farm and the farmer sold their vegetables, produce and even hay, at the farm gate. Now, farmer families are a small part of the food system. For some families, it has been difficult to continue making an income on a small family farm, and many families have had to sell their land, find other work to supplement a farm income, or be creative in what they are growing. Buying locally, from families like the Medernach's can make a difference in a farmer's life. They can make a living as they choose, employ local people on their farm, buy the goods and services they need in their small towns and encourage others by their success. Choosing to support and eat food produced in one's area means food is fresher and likely more nutritious, has fewer 'travel miles' on it, has less handling, and there's less time between harvest and consumption. Getting to know a farm family with a long history such as the Medernach's' allow us to understand that real people grow our food, and that we have an obligation to support their businesses if we want quality food on our tables.

**Explorations:** Read the story with your students. Find Cudworth Saskatchewan on a map. Have students answer the questions relating to the story, orally or in writing. Ask students to draw something they heard in the story; role play a part of the story; have students retell the story.

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Have the students ever visited a farm, or grown or picked their own vegetables? Connect their experiences with the events in the story.

**Branching Out:** For younger students (PreK - Grade 3), read the story aloud, and ask students to orally answer the questions. For older students, glean some facts about the size of the farm and ask the children to convert the acres they farm to something relevant, such as the size of their playground or a football or soccer field. Cudworth Saskatchewan is 86 km from Saskatoon and the farm is 100 km. Older students could use the computer to research Cudworth to discover what other farm-related businesses are in town that families such as the Medernach's might be supporting with their business; and other facts about family farming in our province, and Canada.

1. How many years have the Medernach's farmed this land?
2. What generation of farmers are they on this land?
3. What is the purpose of the shelter belt that was planted around the vegetable garden?
4. Who else besides their family works on the farm?
5. What equipment do they use to plant and harvest their carrots?
6. How do they sow the carrot seeds so they don't have waste, i.e. to thin?
7. Do they use fertilizer or manure to enrich the soil?
8. What else do the Medernach's grow besides carrots?
9. How do they store their produce in the fall and winter?
10. When did they start bringing their produce to sell in Saskatoon?
11. What time do they have to leave their farm on market days? How long does it take them to get to Saskatoon on market days? Would you be willing to get up that early?
12. What are the benefits to their farm of being a member of the Saskatoon Farmers' Market?
13. Who else do they sell their produce to besides people who come to the Saskatoon Farmers' Market?
14. What was the biggest challenge for this growing season?

For more details on commercially growing vegetables in Saskatchewan, see Agriculture in the Classroom's Teacher Resource, *Healthy Food Healthy Body Study Series 2002* [www.aitc.sk.ca](http://www.aitc.sk.ca) as well as Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture and Food [www.agriculture.gov.sk.ca/vegetables](http://www.agriculture.gov.sk.ca/vegetables) .

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## The Medernach Family Farm

My name is Gail and I farm with my husband Roman in the Cudworth area. We have been married for thirty years and have farmed all that time. We live on the farm that Roman was born on and lived all his life here. His father Fritz and mother Irene lived and farmed on this farm for 40 years before that. Roman's father bought this farm just 1 km from where he was born. Fritz's father Joseph came to Canada in 1903 and farmed in the Cudworth area all his life, and so the Medernach's have farmed in Cudworth for over 100 years!

We have a grain farm of 1800 acres (728.4 hectares) and grow wheat (for bread), barley (for beer), peas (for soup), oats (for oatmeal porridge), and specialty canola (the kind KFC uses to fry their chicken). In 1987 I decided to grow a market garden to help with the family finances. I joined the Saskatoon Farmers' Market and grow 10 acres (4.05 hectares) of vegetables every year.

I grow carrots, potatoes, cabbage, cucumbers, peas, beans, kohlrabi, cauliflower, broccoli, onions, beets, zucchini, squash, Brussels sprouts, pumpkins, tomatoes, and corn. We use a practice called green manure for our fertilizer. The year before we plant the garden, Roman seeds oats into the ground. When the crop starts to turn into a seed head he discs the green oats into the ground. As this decays it adds nitrogen to the soil, which acts as a fertilizer for the following year. We also planted a shelterbelt all around the garden plots. The shelterbelt is a row of trees that protect the garden from the wind and also traps heat for the plants. We used trees that produce berries like Buffalo Berry, Saskatoon, and Sandcherry trees. These trees help attract birds that eat bugs that could harm our garden.

Each year I hire six students from our local high school. They help with the seeding. The garden is seeded with a walk-behind precision seeder that has a different disc for each crop so the seeds are planted not too thick or not too thin. I can also change the depth that the seeds go. Corn must be planted 2 inches (5.08 cm) deep but carrots only ½ inch (1.3 cm). Each crop has different needs. The students transplant crops like cabbage and tomatoes. The little seedlings are started in the greenhouse in late winter and then are put outside once the weather has warmed.

The students weed the garden with hoes and a hand rototiller. Then Roman cultivates between the rows with a tractor and cultivator.

When the vegetables start to ripen, usually in July, the students start to harvest. We pick, and then hydro cool the produce in cold water. When the produce is cooled and clean we put it in a cooler until Saturday morning when we load and head to the market.

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We live about 100 km from Saskatoon, so it takes us about 1 ½ hours to arrive. We leave home at 5:00 A.M.

We also sell some produce to the Good Food Box, usually potatoes, and occasionally carrots. Sometimes people come to our farm to buy large volumes of things like cabbage for cabbage rolls or sauerkraut, potatoes in 50 pound bags to last the winter, or corn for freezing.

We sell vegetables all summer long right until the pumpkins are sold for Halloween. We have no winter storage so that is the end of our season. Other producers at the market do have the cool storage facilities, so they can sell vegetables all year long. During winter we plan next year's garden, buy seeds and rest.

Each year is different growing. We don't always get good production on every crop but we always get enough crops to sell. Sometimes it is too hot and dry; some years the sun doesn't shine long enough. This year the spring was very cold and some of the plants froze. This summer was very cold so the bumblebees were not active enough to pollinate the cucumbers early. The squashes and pumpkins were late. This autumn is one of the nicest falls I can remember and so the late vegetables did mature. It is October 1st and still not a killing frost!

Once again we were blest with a bountiful harvest. We live in a very productive province and for that I am thankful. Farming is what my husband and I love. There are challenges but greater rewards. To grow the food for my family to eat reassures its quality and safety. To sell my produce to our customers at the Saskatoon Farmers' Market gives me great satisfaction. They can ask me any question about the food they feed their family. Customers can be assured that when they shop at our market the produce has been grown locally by the seller.

I would love to meet any of you at the Saskatoon Farmers' Market any Saturday between 8 AM and 2 PM.

Gail Medernach  
G and R Gardens

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