



JOHN MORRISS
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Not sexy, but sensible

Biofuels have certainly grabbed everyone's attention, including from governments who are keen to be seen as supporting the ethanol and biodiesel industries.

However, as anyone who has ever thrown a log into a stove knows, there are simpler ways of obtaining heat from biofuel, and unlike ethanol, there is no question about the net energy gain. Most of us don't want to go back to wood stoves, nor do we want our towns and cities blanketed in wood smoke from hundreds of individual chimneys. But there is a more efficient option for generating heat or even electricity from wood, straw or other biofuels — including cattails.

Which, as reported last week, is exactly what some residents are hoping to do in St. Laurent. Using a boiler developed by Vidor Industries of Arborg and Morris, they would install a district heating system for the town, with underground pipes delivering hot water or antifreeze to homes and businesses in the town. District heating has worked before in Canada, and is common in Europe. In Denmark, 1.5 million houses are heated with district heating, and some plants burn straw or other biofuel. Some are co-generation plants, producing electricity and then using the waste heat for district heating.

The Vidor system can use a variety of fuels, including straw. Consider how much of that, especially flax straw, already goes up in smoke every year. Cattails apparently produce between four and six tonnes per acre, and can be grown in constructed wetlands to remove nutrients that would otherwise flow into Lake Winnipeg. Given that new water quality regulations will require small communities to upgrade their sewage systems, there is an ideal match here.

Unlike ethanol and biofuel plants, which so far have been industrial-sized and owned by large companies, systems such as this would necessarily be located in the small communities which would benefit from the economic activity and keeping their energy dollars at home. Direct combustion and district heating may be less sexy than a big ethanol plant, but deserve equal incentives from government.

A favourite teacher passes

Many readers will be among the thousands of former University of Manitoba faculty of agriculture students who took courses from Dr. Anna Storgaard, who passed away earlier this month. I was not one of them, but had the good fortune to meet Anna through another connection. She was a colleague and good friend to my late father-in-law Dr. Jack Truscott, a fellow forage professor at the university. Anna gave the eulogy at Jack's funeral, and it was there I got another sense of one of the reasons that so many students declared her their best professor. Despite failing eyesight which would have prevented her from referring to notes, she leaned a forearm on the lectern in the professional manner of a seasoned lecturer, and spoke in the clear, direct and engaging way that she had developed through thousands of hours in front of students.

Anna received many formal awards for her accomplishments — the 1971 Olive B. Stanton Award as Teacher of the Year at the U of M, the Queen's Silver Jubilee Medal in 1977 and the Canadian Society of Agronomy Teaching Award in 1984. She was chosen for the Citizen Ambassador Program three times, including trips to Russia, Australia/New Zealand and South America. But the most important recognition was the less formal one from students, in whom she took a personal interest, even after her retirement. Former student and *Co-operator* contributor Sandi Knight speaks of her annual exchange of Christmas cards and letters, and that she has kept all 22 of them.

Brian Oleson, now a professor of agricultural economics at the U of M and currently in South America (see page 30), e-mailed last week with a story of when he was at the Canadian Wheat Board and in charge of the scholarship program. Each year the board would host a lunch for the recipients. Anna would volunteer to organize it, but that didn't mean booking a catered lunch at the University Club. She made the meal herself and presented Brian only with the receipts from Safeway.

Anna retired in 1989, just as interest in forages was undergoing a resurgence. It gave her great satisfaction to hear about the latest developments, and especially the strong producer interest such as the sold-out attendance at the annual grazing school in Brandon.

Anna is survived by her sister Inga and several members of her extended family. Many former colleagues and students attended her memorial service last week in Winnipeg.



Singing the Blues – We've lost our roots

BY LES KLETKE

Last Saturday night our little town had a Blues night. It was a sad affair, good but sad and not in the way that the Blues are meant to be sad.

First, let's be clear. I was the kid the teacher asked to just mouth the words in all those elementary school Christmas concerts. I was never chosen for all "special choirs" that performed on school occasions.

Perhaps my lack of musical ability has taught me to listen to the words rather than the music, because, to me, if you take away the words, Happy Birthday and God Bless America sound a lot alike. I could not carry a tune in a bucket lined with a plastic bag.

The Blues nights have been going on for several years in our town. The upstairs of the local curling rink is transformed to a Blues Club to accommodate patrons who pay 10 bucks each.

It is small-town stuff, the kind of thing that has built and maintained so many of our communities. The night before, the Most Patient Lady in the World and I attended the local high school musical and watched those kids sing their hearts out. It was good entertainment and that is what you do in a small town to make things work.

That is the life we love and want to support.

So the Most Patient Lady in the World and another nurse and her husband who happens to be the Pioneer Seed corn dealer and I were off for a night of the Blues.

I tried to make it into a theme evening. I barbecued some ribs and used hickory barbecue sauce. I baked sweet potatoes and we had a supper that I thought would set the mood.

Then we headed over to The Club — not the Curling Club; it was now a Blues Club, but we could just call it The Club like we always do.

The evening went well and the River City Blues Band was great. They have a guitarist that is a performer second to none. I am sure if not for his day job this guy could make the big time.

The bass player is like bass player should be, a statue not moving, no expression and only the slightest finger movement as he lays down the bass line. And the female vocalist had a voice so big it could fill the outdoors.

I have a friend that used to host these events who describes the Blues as some guy telling sad stories with a riff on the guitar.

"The cotton got rotten" and TWAAAAAng. "My dog is blind" and TWAnnnnnnnnnnnng, kind

of stuff. But I think the music is so much more. River City Blues had the whole package.

We settled into our seats and enjoyed the evening. It was good fun, but something was missing. The Blues have changed. They have left their roots; they are no longer based in agriculture.

Whether it is Chicago or Kansas City or Memphis that claims to be the Home of the Blues they are all agricultural-based cities and the songs are the songs of the fields. But not any more.

Today's Blues songs are written by people who have never even seen a cotton field or a flood. They are concrete dwellers. Sure they might have felt some pain, but it is not the pain of the field that gives this music its roots.

It is not only the Blues that has left its roots, it is everything around us. Our society was once based on agriculture. It isn't any more. I am sure that there will be a sad song to sing about that, but the songwriters are no longer from our industry.

We have to keep telling our story because the general population doesn't understand it anymore. It will get even worse if we don't tell the songwriters of tomorrow about food and fibre production today.

Manitoba

CO-OPERATOR
THE FARMERS' NEWSPAPER

1666 Dublin Avenue
Winnipeg, MB R3H 0H1

MAILING ADDRESS

P.O. Box 9800,
Winnipeg, MB., Canada, R3C 3K7
944-5767 Fax 954-1422

Publisher • **Bob Willcox**
bob@fbcpublishing.com

Associate Publisher/
Editorial Director • **John Morriss**
john.morriss@fbcpublishing.com 204-944-5754

Editor • **Laura Rance**
laura@fbcpublishing.com 204-954-1427

Managing Editor • **Dave Bedard**
daveb@fbcpublishing.com 204-944-5762

Director of Sales & Circulation • **Lynda Tityk**
lynda.tityk@fbcpublishing.com 204-944-5755

Production/Art Director • **John Vandale**
john@fbcpublishing.com 204-954-1451

NEWS STAFF • REPORTERS

Bonnie Baltessen
204-954-1421 bonnieb@fbcpublishing.com

Allan Dawson
204-435-2392 allan@fbcpublishing.com

Karli Flinta-Murphy
204-944-5566 karli@fbcpublishing.com

Ron Friesen
204-954-1413 ron@fbcpublishing.com

Lorraine Stevenson
204-745-3424 lorraine@fbcpublishing.com

ADVERTISING SERVICES

Classified Advertising:
Monday to Friday: 8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Phone (204) 954-1415
Toll-free 1-800-782-0794

SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES:

Toll-Free 1-800-782-0794
U.S. Subscribers call: 1-204-944-5568
E-mail: subscription@fbcpublishing.com

Member, Canadian Circulation Audit Board,
Member, Canadian Farm Press Association,
Member, Canadian Agri-marketing Association

Subscription rates:

(GST Registration #R131660425)
Canada
12 months – \$39.90 (incl. \$2.45 GST)
24 months – \$68.40 (incl. \$4.20 GST)
USA
12 months – \$150.00 (US funds)

Publications Mail Agreement #40062998
PAP Registration #10682
ISSN 0025-2239

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Publications Assistance Program and the Canadian Magazine Fund toward our mailing and editorial costs.

Canadian Postmaster: Return undeliverable Canadian addresses (covers only) to:
Circulation Dept., PO Box 9800,
Winnipeg, MB. R3C 3K7

