

FARMERS' DIALOGUE

Canadian Pioneers



John, Jenny, Phyllis and Bill

The Bocock family, father, mother and sons Bill and John, dairy farmed on 432 hectares near Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Bill and John discovered the principles of Initiatives of Change in 1958, and as a result they were able to heal frictions between themselves. John apologised for his critical, self righteous attitude towards Bill, his older brother. This reconciliation brought about major changes in the direction of their lives. The brothers found a purpose beyond making money. With their parents they decided that as well as taking responsibility for farming in their own country, they would visit farmers in other parts of the world to share needs, challenges and solutions. These visits have taken them to 12 countries.

One unexpected outcome of their responsible attitude of getting on with people had unexpected results. In the 1970s, frustrated prairie grain farmers suffered lost markets and high shipping demurrage costs resulting from strikes and lockouts in west coast ports. John flew with concerned friends to Vancouver and met with Henry Kancs, outspoken business agent of the Grain Workers Union. John found that Henry had never set foot on a prairie farm so invited him to visit and meet with farm leaders. Henry came. He returned later to speak at a farmer's meeting. Later he sent John the text of his speech to canola growers in which he said, "The grain workers are central to the port's operations and we are determined to provide the best, most efficient service we can for the farmers. We can only provide the quality of service the farmers need when there is open, on-going dialogue between us."



Bill on a farm in India

Other family initiatives include Bill serving as director of the Alberta Surface Rights Federation and the Big Lake Environmental Society. John is a director of the Breton Plots Soil Conservation Society and wife Jenny served as alternate board member of the Clean Air Strategic Alliance, representing farm women.

In 2007, to avoid their farmland being absorbed into urban housing and to meet a critical need for the University of Alberta Faculty of Agricultural, Life and Environmental Sciences to expand its research capabilities, Bill and Phyllis, John and Jenny, with daughter, Rachel,

sold most of their farm to the University at a fraction of the appraised value. This transaction represents their long-term view of their responsibility as farmers in a world where many go hungry and there are question marks about the kind of world we are leaving to future generations. Indigenous friends heartily support what they have done with their land. In appreciation, the University created the Bocock Chair in Agriculture and Environment. First to occupy the chair is Dr. William Shotyk, world-renowned soil and water researcher. "Preserving the future, The story behind the St Albert research Station" is available online at www.ales.ualberta.ca/Alumni.aspx

