

**RURAL WARRIORS**

# Ag Business and Crop Inc. – taking field health to new heights

*Palmerston-based business on leading edge of mapping, spray drones technology*

*\* Rural Warriors is a monthly instalment in the Listowel Banner, highlighting local environmentally-conscious industry and companies in North Perth and beyond.*

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PALMERSTON – It would be an impossible task to find anyone who could coherently argue against the value of farmers. They feed the world’s population in its entirety, and much of their success or failure in the agricultural sector is based upon the health of the soil in which they plant, and subsequently the crops that grow from it. The general importance of this to literally everyone cannot be understated.

There’s no question the farming industry has changed drastically in the last few decades especially. Ever-emerging new technologies have allowed farmers to perform jobs more quickly and efficiently, in turn allowing them to divert their attention to the countless other daily tasks that require it. And maybe even obtain a little more of that coveted personal or family time in the process.

Felix Weber, owner of Ag Business and Crop (ABC) Inc. based out of Palmerston, made the move across the Atlantic from Switzerland to Canada in 1985. By the following year, he had an established farm on Line 86 in Huron County, ultimately growing his operation to 1,000 acres. And very early on in his farming career, Weber had become quite interested in information gathering and utilizing new technologies to compile data to make for more efficient cropping.

His interest in emerging



Dan McNee Photos

(Above) Felix and Bernice Weber, owners of Ag Business and Crop Inc. based out of Palmerston, are one of Canada’s top retail providers of agricultural aerial mapping and spraying drones, and are pictured above with one of the latter. Felix Weber has become a renowned national authority in the growing industry, which utilizes drone technology to improve field and crop health. (Below) Ag Business and Crop Inc. also deals in precision automated soil samplers, a key piece of equipment for helping to determine crop soil health.

tech would help Weber blaze a completely new career path by the mid-2000s. The stresses involved in overseeing such a large and essentially one-man farming operation prompted him to move on and get into the agricultural consulting business, and from there Weber delved into what would become one of his life’s passions – utilizing new technologies to increase crop production and knowledge.

“You walk a 100-acre field, but out of the air you see a lot of differences,” said Weber, adding that using satellite data is more accessible, while affirming his belief that using multiple tools available will get the best results possible. He and his wife, Bernice, the proud parents of two, initially launched ABC in 2005 as a consulting firm. The couple now reside on the border between North Perth and the Town of Minto. “How can I use this? This is where the idea of using drones came in.”

By 2011, the Webers had incorporated a retail drone aspect into their business. By 2013, they were strictly retail, later adding a line of precision automated soil samplers into the fold. The learning curve of the technology and finding a way to utilize the mapping data being collected by the

drones was steep at first, but Weber was more than up to the challenge.

“I was very early in the game, which means it’s a lot more work to get to where you want,” he said. “Farming wasn’t ready for it (at the time). But I was able to make it work in other industries. The (farming) industry just didn’t see the value at that point.”

**Ag applications**

Weber’s early clients were mainly within the construction and mining industries, but interest within the agricultural sector steadily grew. He bought his first drone in his native Switzerland in 2011, and later became a licensed dealer for that particular brand, the first of its kind in North America.

Today, ABC carries a variety of models from the XAG and DJI lines of GPS mapping and spray drones, among others. Canadian regulations have not yet been solidified for pesticide, fungicide and herbicide drone usage, with Weber himself sitting on a national committee to work with agencies like Transport Canada to help determine the complex guidelines involved with creating an ‘agricultural spraying drone playbook’ of sorts.

Currently, only substances

like fertilizers and seed spreading are permitted for usage in spray drones, which work hand-in-hand with their mapping counterparts. Essentially, after field mapping is completed (at a height of up to 400 feet), the data collected can be inputted into the spray drone to seek out the stress areas of a field and apply the appropriate pesticide or fungicide (typically at a height of 12-15 feet) to assist in bringing it back to health.

“The sooner you can recognize that stress, even if I can see it, the sooner I can do something so that it doesn’t get worse. I’m losing less yield potential,” said Weber. “And the stress over here may not be the same stress as over there. You can have a moisture stress here and a nitrogen stress there, and they both show up as red on my map. So you’ve got to walk to both.”

“The ground sprayer isn’t going away in my mind. This is just another tool to help. Just another tool in the tool box.”

**Continuing education**

Weber has become one of the leading authorities on aerial drone applications to the agricultural sector over his nearly 20 years in business. And while ABC Inc. has its expand-

ing office and workspace within the Palmerston Industrial Park, the business is national in scope when it comes to drone and soil sampler sales. The internet has made that a reality for many businesses, and ABC is no different.

“Our business is national, and people don’t realize that,” said Bernice. “We seem small, but Felix’s reach is national.”

Bernice assists in various aspects of the ‘behind-the-scenes’ operations of the business, while remaining ABC’s primary advocate. With five employees and looking for another suitable candidate to hire, both Felix and Bernice commented that finding the right person for the job doesn’t necessarily mean expertise in the field – which is still somewhat niche – but more of an enthusiastic individual willing to learn, just as the Webers continually strive to do.

Both are graduates of the advanced agriculture leadership program through the Rural Ontario Institute. The program is a highly-involved, 18-month course that is the practical equivalent of a master’s degree for those in the industry. Felix and Bernice have travelled to Texas and as far as Portugal and Morocco through the program.

“I think that says a couple of things; one, that (Felix) is a firm believer in that you can continually learn,” said Bernice. “And two, it’s an incredible program in terms of the networking that you can do.”

“I can’t say enough about that program, and not enough people are aware of it.”

Felix also recently attended Agritechnica in November, the world’s leading trade fair for agricultural machinery that was hosted in Hanover, Germany in 2023. He and Bernice also frequent conferences and ag-related shows across Canada, all in an effort to both increase their own education and in turn educate others on the benefits that ABC Inc. can provide through its drones and soil samplers.

Above all else when it comes to his line of work, Felix wants to educate those who show interest in buying the products ABC carries. He is constantly going the extra mile to post instructional and troubleshooting videos on the business’s website to assist those who have questions about the technology. For him, knowledge of the tools being used is paramount.

“Support is very, very high on my list,” said Felix. “I’ve always believed in education. You never stop. As soon as you stop educating yourself, you’re stopped in a certain world.”

Ag Business and Crop Inc. is located at 1-131 Frank Lambier Crt. in Palmerston. It can be reached at 519-343-5454 ext. 101, via email at info@Agbusiness.ca, online at Agbusiness.ca, or found through social media on Facebook and X (formerly known as Twitter).



**ABC Ag Business & Crop Inc.**

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## Spraying Drones

Built for farmers. We support and service what we sell and are manufacturer-certified by XAG, DJI and Ag Eagle.

- Spread liquid or granular
- GPS guided automation
- Precise spot spraying

