

**Fifth generation farmers -  
Guichon family has been tending to the land for almost 130 years.**

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Peter Guichon was four the first time he drove a tractor. He was the only one left in the field with his dad, Jack, who had two tractors to take back to the barn.

He looked over at his first-born son and thought, 'Why not?'

"We were spreading manure or some darn thing and I wanted both the tractors home," remembers Jack, now 82, his face tanned and well lined from years spent on the farm.

"I got him started; I jumped off and got onto my own tractor. I went faster and passed him and he was mad at me," Jack recalls, laughing as he sits in a chair at the busy farm office at the end of 46A Street, just steps from the home he shares with his wife Lorraine.

That day Peter drove the tractor a quarter of a mile, steering it safely back home under the watchful eye of his dad.

Peter, now 53, is still driving tractors.

At 680 hectares (1,700 acres), the Guichons run the largest soil-based farming operation in B.C., using the land to grow vegetables that can be found in season at Thrifty Foods and frozen foods under the familiar brand names of Lucerne and Snowcrest at stores such as Safeway.

In 1879, when the Guichon farm was established, it grew only grass and hay. The type of crop was restricted to the kind of equipment they had, and there just wasn't the population to support a large vegetable operation.

"It didn't look like it does today. A lot of it was bush and not farmable," says Peter, a fifth generation farmer.

In the early 1870s, Laurent Guichon, Peter's great-grandfather, left Savoie, France, to North America in search of a new life. In his first few years in B.C., Laurent ran a mule train to Barkerville, which brought supplies to gold miners.

Along the way, he ran into one of the Ladner brothers who encouraged him to buy land in Delta. The original farmstead was bounded by River Road West to the north, the Tsawwassen Indian Reserve to the south, 41B Street to the west and 46A Street to the east.

"We're sitting in some of that now," Peter says.

When Laurent died, Jack's father was one of nine children who received 60 hectares (150 acres) each. From there, Jack continued to buy or lease more tracts of land.

Today they own 150 hectares (375 acres) with the remaining 540 hectares (1,350 acres) being farmed through 15 leases.

However, the family's available land base is slowly eroding as access to it becomes harder in the face of port expansion and the Tsawwassen First Nation treaty, changes in crops to name just a few challenges.

The treaty, if ratified, will automatically remove 210 hectares (518 acres) from the Agricultural Land Reserve. About 180 hectares (450 acres) of that is farmed by the Guichons, who lease it from the province.

It will be turned over to the band once the provincial and federal governments ratify the treaty. The TFN ratified the agreement July 25.

"The (TFN) have indicated that we can rent it back in the short-term, but we'll get no more than a one- or two-year lease," Peter says.

The Guichons have already lost 80 hectares (200 acres) of leased land to some of those crop changes-namely blueberries-as property owners are eager to sell at good prices to blueberry farmers.

Delta estimates there are now 1,200 hectares (3,000 acres) of blueberries being grown here, a marked increase from previous years.

Even in the face of those obstacles, giving up on farming isn't an option. "It's a good way to live," says Guichon, arms tanned dark from hours spent in the fields.

"It's a way of life and you're brought up with it. Some people ask why I keep farming. Well, it's all I know," Peter says.

One obstacle the Guichons thought they had cleared was government expropriation. Like so many farmers here, Jack learned four decades ago, through the mail no less, that Victoria had expropriated his farm to support the superport that was being developed at nearby Roberts Bank.

"We opened it (the letter) up and it said you no longer own this property and if you don't believe us check with the land registry office," Jack recalls.

Peter chimes in, saying he wished his dad kept the letter.

"I know I should have kept it. I was too damn mad to keep it," Jack says.

For the Guichons, it appears that may happen again. On the same land.

The B.C. Railway Company wants to buy 71 hectares (175 acres) for a rail switching yard to accommodate port expansion.

About 54 hectares of it (135 acres) is farmed by the Guichons.

That section is the same land expropriated in the 1960s.

The Guichons bought it back in 1999 when the government of the day finally deemed it wasn't needed for port development. But now, under a new government, port expansion is occurring and it's possible the Guichons will be forced to surrender the land again.

"Never heard of anybody getting the same land expropriated twice," Jack says.

"When (B.C. Railway) first approached us we said we make our living farming the land. If you could find us similar quality land in the area we'd look at it.

But we haven't heard back from them in a while," Peter says.

In August, however, B.C. Railway applied to the Agricultural Land Commission to remove 21 hectares (84 acres) of farmland from crop production. Some of those nine parcels include property farmed by the Guichons, who were unaware of the application.

In spite of those challenges Peter and his four siblings keep farming.

Even the kids are involved, operating a roadside corn stand throughout the summer on Arthur Drive and working in the office part time.

"They've done a real good job," Jack says proudly.

Peter is quick to say it's his dad who is responsible for the success the family enjoys today.

"They pushed me out of the way now and it's OK," Jack says. "I still putter around a bit here and there."

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