

Bruce Van Der Molen, farmer and musician

Twice a day he walks through his chicken barn, listening to the machines, ever vigilant for any sound that shouldn't be present. Using a magnifier he checks displays.

Bruce Van Der Molen of Jarvis is vision impaired, a condition he has lived with since birth. As a youngster he attended the W. Ross Macdonald School for the Blind in Brantford, from grade 3 to grade 12. This was a residential school – Bruce spent the week at the school and was home for weekends. He found it to be a good experience.

Bruce and his son Ben work 150 acres, growing soybeans and wheat as cash crops. Ben, “does most of the fun stuff,” Bruce commented, things like tractor work. Ben also works off farm.

They raise broiler chickens which are processed by Maple Lodge and target marketed for Swiss Chalet. His barns have a capacity of 35,000 chickens, mixed pullets and cockerels, which are marketed at an average weight of 2.2 kg (5 pounds) per bird. Every seven weeks, a new batch of day-olds arrive. Birds are handled on an all-in, all-out basis, with barns cleaned and disinfected between lots. Feeding is automated.

Bruce needs to sort out what jobs are visual and what can be done in other ways. He needs to work with other people a lot. “farming for anyone is a team game now, and for me even more,” he said, “because I need to rely on others to do the work that is not practical for me.”

COVID-19 has created extra challenges for him. Bruce related that he has taken a 15% production cut, as well as a 6 cent per kg price cut during the pandemic. Costs however have not dropped. “This has created challenges but not impossible ones,” he said, adding that it is looking better now than it was earlier.

Bruce has another business besides the farm. While at W. Ross Macdonald, he learned music and piano tuning. He has a contract with the school for piano tuning and travels there every other week in addition to tuning pianos for others in the area. There is a bit of a challenge in this now, as society places less value on real music than in the past. There are less pianos and more keyboards.



Bruce Van Der Molen raises chickens and is also a skilled musician.

Bruce feels that people should, “take opportunity to learn piano or whatever instrument is possible.” Bruce credits, “great neighbours,” as well as his parents for driving him to his tuning jobs.

A skilled musician, he enjoys playing piano at his and other churches or for various other groups and is a member of the Haldimand Norfolk Concert Band.