

# Winnipeg Free Press

## Putting a value on farmland

By: Andrea Geary

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A Manitoba century farm holds tremendous sentimental value for the family that's owned the land for generations, but what is its true market value if the time comes to sell?

La Salle resident Debbie Pieterse, who owns and operates Prairie Sky Appraisal and Consulting Services, is in the business of assessing land and calculating its value. She said, among other factors, she looks at municipal records, recent sales of land in the surrounding area, and evaluation of the soil quality for farmland. For example, prime soil in the Portage la Prairie area would be rated as a one in the Canadian Land Inventory, while most of Manitoba's arable land is rated at two or three. Pasture land could be four or five, and land unsuitable for any type of farming would be six or seven.

"It depends on the area," she said, adding that the higher heat units typically experienced in the Red River Valley push the land's value up to between \$4,000 and \$5,000 an acre, while farmland in other parts of the province would more likely be priced at approximately \$2,500 an acre.

Of course land closer to a metropolitan centre fetches a higher price because of its development potential. "The closer you are to Winnipeg, Brandon or Morden/Winkler, the higher the price," Pieterse said, adding supply and demand influences value.

Pieterse has worked in property and land assessment for many years. She grew up on her family's cattle farm near Ashern, Man. and wanted to pursue a career that involved agriculture. She graduated from the University of Manitoba with a bachelor degree in animal science in 1982. She accepted a job with the provincial assessment branch in Souris, Man., later moving to the Portage la Prairie office, then becoming district supervisor in the Dauphin, Man. branch. She was also sales manager for the province, conducting quality assurance of the sales information used in province-wide reassessments. She later became an appraiser with the Crown Lands and Property Agency and was based in Portage.

She said her toughest assignment was assessing land near Shoal Lake, Man. that was badly flooded. This involved travelling into the area on a quad or skidoo, and also offering some property owners an expropriation settlement.

"It can be a very emotional thing."

Pieterse's work at the Portage office took her to the RM of Macdonald and she liked La Salle. She and her husband moved to the community in 2009.

Pieterse earned her professional designation as an accredited appraiser with the Appraisal Institute of Canada three years ago and decided to set up her own business working from her La Salle home. She's been able to put her agricultural knowledge to good use, saying that about half of her business involves agricultural property with assessments mainly done for estate planning, taxes and sales. She travels around the province, but much of what she needs in terms of municipal and real estate records and even aerial photos of agricultural land are now available online.

The other half of her business is reserve fund studies for condominium developments used to set out the amount of money owners should contribute to cover external repairs, replacement and general maintenance of the property for a 30-year period.

"I get a lot of business through web searches and word-of-mouth," Pieterse said. She estimates that there are about 70 certified appraisers in Manitoba and more are needed.

She added that the variety in her job keeps things interesting. "You learn something new each time."

For more information on Pieterse's company, see <http://prairieskyappraisal.ca>

#### **Andrea Geary**

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