

# Maine grain economy needs to focus on infrastructure

BY ANTHONY BRINO  
BDN STAFF

When Eric Theriault’s father, Robert, started potato farming in Drummond, New Brunswick, in the 1970s, it didn’t go well. He “lost quite a lot of barrels of potatoes” and almost faced bankruptcy, Eric Theriault told farmers at the Maine Grain Conference, held last month at Northern Maine Community College by the University of Maine Cooperative Extension. Theriault’s father also had grown cereal grains, such as oats, and made money selling seeds to other growers, so he focused on grains. By the 1980s he had a bustling grain seed business, with silos, dryers, a processing house and several hundred acres in production. Eric Theriault now leads eastern Grains Inc. in Drummond, about 35 miles northeast of Van Buren, selling seeds and equipment to farmers growing grains for animal livestock feed or human food, ending up in bread, beer and granola. The farm harvests about 3,000 acres of oats, barley, wheat and soybeans, rotating on a variety of two- to five-year schedules with potatoes, grains, soybeans and clovers. “The buyers are looking for quality and consistency

and specific requirements now,” Theriault said. “It’s really complicated to harvest grain. To be able to focus on quality, you need the proper equipment to harvest at the right time.” Grains and oilseeds such as soybeans need to be harvested at specific moisture levels, sorted into different sizes, dried and stored until they can be turned into malted barley for beer, oats for granola or wheat for bread. Growing grains for the human market requires certain equipment — though large equipment isn’t always necessary — and the demand for quality grains, especially for organic grains, is increasing, according to Loic Dewavrin, co-owner of a 1,500-acre organic grain and oilseed farm in Les Cedres, about 40 miles west of Montreal along the Saint Lawrence River. “Grains can be fragile,” and they each have their own needs for ideal harvest, processing and storage, said Dewavrin, whose farm also has an oil press and a roller mill for white flour. Dewavrin and his two other brothers transitioned their family farm to organic in the 1990s and have had fairly good success growing a variety of grain crops and a few niche oil seeds and processing them into



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Space at Buck Farms in Mapleton that used to store potatoes is now a grain cleaning system at the farm’s Maine Malt House, producing malted barley for beer brewers around the state.

value-added forms with a mix of equipment. “Make trials on your farm to select the varieties that are less susceptible to diseases,” Dewavrin advised. “That’s something we do every year with trial plots to make seed. When you grow your own seeds you want to have many varieties.” They also use a variety of equipment to clean the grains and separate them into sizes, including a rotary cleaner attached to a fan and a gravity table used for smaller quantities. Over the last several years, the University of Maine Cooperative Extension and others have been promoting grains to Maine farmers, including Aroostook County potato growers who already are growing grains as rotation or cover crops but not harvesting them for the human food market. At the same time, Amber Lambke, president of Maine Grains and executive director of the Maine Grain Alliance, has been

working to “set up the infrastructure” for building a robust state grain economy with farmers, bakeries and grocers. Maine Grains’ mill in Skowhegan processes wheat, oats, rye, spelt, corn, buckwheat, stone milled flour and rolled oats. “Over the last three years since we’ve launched our business, our grower pool has doubled every year to about 24 different growers,” Lambke said while attending the conference. “Our ability to source

certified organic grains is improving all the time.” This season, Lambke said she’s looking to buy more “heritage” grains — older varieties, such as red winter wheat and spelt — as well as organic and heirloom corn. Last year, in a collaboration with the cooperative extension, three farms grew spelt, which was milled at Maine Grains and then sold to bakeries around the Northeast. The mill also is making locally malted barley flour, used in baking and chocolate making. Maine Grains’ mill, housed inside a former jail in Skowhegan, has a good part of the infrastructure needed for turning grains into food, but not of all of it, Lambke said. “We have infrastructure to be able to receive, move and clean grain,” she said. “We don’t have infrastructure to dry grains. We do need farms to be tooled up and ready to manage moisture, pests and things like that.” At a minimum, farmers who want to grow grains that could be sold to a mill for human-grade consumption need “to think ahead about drying and long-term storage,” Lambke said. “This is one area that still needs addressing in the field of revitalizing Maine’s grain economy.”

## All-Star Gymnastics grows in County

Program now reaches three communities

BY JEN LYNDY  
BDN STAFF

HOULTON — When Allison Wheeler first began teaching gymnastics in 2008, she felt her endeavor was a success after 20 children — more than double her original goal of eight — showed up for classes. But she never imagined her business would “blow up” the way it has. All-Star Gymnastics now reaches 350 children through branches in three communities, offering gymnastics, cheerleading and dance. The business also provides the only competitive gymnastics and cheerleading programs in Aroostook County. “This has just become more than I ever thought it could be,” she said recently while helping train gymnasts inside her Houlton gym. “I talk to a lot of people about how we haven’t expanded, we have blown up, and it has been fantastic. I still can’t believe it.” After moving into a permanent facility in Mars Hill in 2010, All-Star Gymnastics expanded to Presque Isle and Houlton in 2011. As interest in her facility grew, she began offering competitive gymnastics and cheerleading classes, as well as dance classes for children. Wheeler is a former gymnast who has taught the sport for eight years. “The gymnastics program is really popular, especially with girls,” said Wheeler. “There are more sports open to boys around here, so it is nice to have another sport that is open



JEN LYNDY | BDN  
All-Star Gymnastics owner Allison Wheeler (second from right) watches as gymnasts tumble inside All-Star Gymnastics in Houlton in March.

to girls. We have three competitions a year, and it is so nice to see these youngsters blossom. We use the USA Gymnastics guidelines when teaching them and helping them advance through the levels.” She said she started team competitions in 2012, to allow the gymnasts and cheerleaders at each facility to compete against other All-Star Gymnastics teams, and also to enter state elementary and upper level competitions. “It really takes two to three years to build up a gymnast to the point where they are strong enough to get ready to compete,” she said. “You have to work with them to build up their endurance and muscles so that they don’t overdue or hurt themselves. You can’t throw them into team competition right away. Prior to coming to our program, most of our gymnasts have only taken programs at their local recreation centers.” Wheeler said that each of her facilities is filled with

competitive level equipment, including balance beams, high bars and tumbling mats. Eight coaches split their time between the three locations. She said she is “very proud” of the cheerleading program, which continues to grow each year. “I have 70 cheerleaders on four separate competitive teams,” she said. “And we have had a number of students since 2008 who have just come and taken tumbling classes. I would say that since we’ve started, more than 100 kids have learned to do a roundoff back handspring and 50 have learned to do back tucks, which is great, because that means they go into high school cheerleading already knowing those tumbling skills.” Amy Suitter of Littleton has her daughter, Hailey, 10, enrolled in the cheerleading program at All-Star Gymnastics in Houlton. She said Thursday evening that her daughter loves “all of it, but the dancing and jumps the most.”

“I enrolled her in the class a little late in the season when I found they had an opening. I had been looking for something for her to do to be more active since she’s not into sports,” said Suitter. “She’s had a blast and was so excited and nervous when they had the competition in Bangor, but she’s already excited for next year. She’s hoping to enroll in gymnastics with them next year so she can learn the tumbling, too.” Hailey said that the “coaches are the best part of the team.” The All-Star Gymnastics cheerleaders also have found success on the competition circuit. “We are now home to the 2014 Maine State Junior All-Star Champions and the 2016 Maine State Mini All-Star Champions,” said Wheeler. Wheeler said she might expand again in northern Maine. “But I would not do it unless I had the quality level staff in place that I need first,” she said.

## Winter

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weekly traffic through the winter from construction workers going to the Twin Rivers mill. And she expects things will get better for tourism. March weekend bookings mostly have been snowmobile traffic, she said. While fishing derbies and other events brought in traffic in February, Willette said, the unseasonably warm weather caused cancellations elsewhere in the state, from cross-country ski events to ice fishing derbies. George Smith, an outdoors writer, said during a Natural Resources Council of Maine news conference in mid-March that the winter was especially difficult for sporting camps and outdoor retailers near snowmobile and ice fishing destinations. In the state’s biggest city, Chris Carleton, owner of the ski and bike shop Allspeed Cyclery and Snow, said sales and repair work was down by about 25 percent this season. Portland lawyer and backcountry skier Ben Leoni said that this dismal season for backcountry skiing makes him “worried this is a glimpse into our future.” Todd Martin, an organizer for the Natural Resources Council of Maine, said that it’s hard to sort out on a year-to-year basis how much of that low snowfall and warm weather is attributable to the El Nino weather pattern and how much to long-term warming. Nick Lambert, vice president of marketing for Sunday River, said the company has made snow about 86 days so far, slightly less than past av-

erages, “but there was a lot less natural snow around.” On top of that, he said, rainy days forced snowmaking to focus more time on resurfacing runs rather than opening new terrain. Bill Brown, the snowmaking and energy adviser for Sunday River, said in legislative testimony that this year has been tough for mountains of all sizes, noting that Saddleback in Rangeley delayed reopening plans amid sale negotiations. The weather this year has put a dent in revenues for Sunday River and Sugarloaf, both of which are owned by the real estate investment trust CNL Lifestyle Properties and managed by Boyne Resorts. In its annual report filed with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, CNL indicated that the El Nino year benefited its western properties, but “the same weather phenomenon caused a snow drought and record warm temperatures in the East, offsetting in part the effects of the highly favorable early season snow conditions in the West.” The opposite was true last winter, the company said. Looking back on the rough ski season so far, Greg Sweetser, executive director of the industry group Ski Maine said snowmaking was a saving grace, despite what he expects will be a compressed season and what was a particularly rough year for cross-country ski areas. “You just can’t replace the aura of a nice snowy field and the snow on the trees,” he said. Lambert said Sunday River still expects to stay open seven days per week through mid-April, cutting back to weekends only through May 1.

### On the job

C&L has named **Pat Lemieux** of Bangor as director of marketing for all divisions of C&L Aviation Group. Lemieux, formerly of the American Heart Association and Bangor Daily News, has more than a decade of experience building brand awareness and audience development for media companies and nonprofit organizations. C&L is a global aircraft maintenance and support company that offers support for regional and corporate aircraft operators. From its 40,000-square-foot facility at Bangor International

Airport, C&L does aircraft maintenance, repairs, parts distribution, interior refurbishments and exterior painting. C&L’s aircraft paint hangar is the largest in the Northeast. In addition to his role at C&L, Lemieux writes about business and social media on LinkedIn, co-hosts a social media-focused podcast, blogs about parenting on bangordailynews.com and speaks about marketing and social media events throughout the state of Maine.

F.L.Putnam Investment Management Co. has hired **Scott Mazuzan** as a private client adviser. Mazuzan, who will be based in the Portland office, will be responsible for delivering F.L.Putnam clients financial planning services from tax, estate and retire-

ment planning to risk assessment, asset location and portfolio construction. Mazuzan has worked for the better part of a decade in the financial services industry. He began his personal finance career at Charles Schwab & Co. Inc. and most recently served as a financial planner at Goldman Financial Planning. Mazuzan received a postgraduate certificate in financial planning from Boston University and a Bachelor of Arts from the University of New Hampshire. He also holds the Certified Financial Planner professional designation.



Mazuzan

**Julia Greenleaf Pitney** has joined Drummond Woodsum’s Bankruptcy, Restructuring & Creditors’ Rights and Trial Services Groups in Portland. Her practice will focus on bankruptcy matters and debtor/creditor litigation. Before joining Drummond Woodsum, Pitney spent 10 years practicing in Lewiston and Portland. She has experience representing national and local lenders and servicers in all phases of litigation and workouts. She also represents clients in bankruptcy cases, including secured and unsecured creditors, trustees,



Greenleaf

purchasers of distressed assets, and directors and officers of troubled companies. Pitney is a 2006 graduate of the University of Maine School of Law. While in law school, she was a case note and comment editor for the Maine Law Review, served as a Bernstein Fellow to Justice Joyce Wheeler, and worked as a student prosecutor at the Cumberland County district attorney’s office in Portland.

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