

I'm a farmer and mom. Lack of rural daycare makes it hard to be both ^[1]

It is a juggling act that we are still perfecting — there are still very hard days and moments.

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EXCERPTS

Kyle, Sask. — It's 7 a.m. and the coffee pot is percolating. I am in the kitchen making lunches while my little girls (ages 4 and 2.5) still sleep. As soon as I have our lunch kit organized, I will wake them up and quickly get them dressed and hustled out the door. Unlike many other moms across Canada who work, my destination is not daycare and then the office. It's out to the field.

I am a grain farmer in Kyle, a small town in Southwest Saskatchewan. It's early May, which means my girls and I are busy seeding this year's crops. This is my sixth year on the farm.

I enjoy farming as a family, but it comes with its share of logistical challenges.

I grew up in Calgary and had an 11-year career in the film industry before meeting my husband and moving here. The girls have been farming with my husband and I since they were born. My oldest had her first cab ride at six weeks when we started harvest and I was needed in the combine, while my husband worked full-time off-farm. Over the past four years, we have worked hard to develop a system that involves farming with our girls and having both grandmas help take the kiddos so they are not in the field with us.

At 8 a.m. we arrive at the field, and I start the tractor to allow it time to warm up while we load all of our things for the day into the cab. We are accessorized to the max with pillows, blankets, toys, books, lunches, diapers, wipes and more coffee for me!

The beauty of technology means that I can put my tractor on autosteering, which drives it up and down the field for me — so aside from turning at the ends of the fields and making sure everything is running the way it should be, my hands are free. It allows us to pass the morning in a tractor cab smaller than a compact car practicing shapes and numbers on the windows with dry-erase markers and, of course, singing along to the "Frozen" soundtrack.

After lunch, it's nap time. My oldest curls up on the bench behind my seat, and my youngest is cozied into a nest of blankets on the floor. After naps, the girls are done farming for the day and are picked up by a grandparent to go play while I continue seeding. I will see them when we stop and gather for supper. My mom usually puts them to bed while my husband is out spraying, and I stay in the field seeding until 12 or 1 a.m. in the morning. Then it's home to sleep and to get ready to do it all again the next day.

Where I live the closest daycare centres are in towns that are 30 to 40 kilometres away.

I enjoy farming as a family, but it comes with its share of logistical challenges. We live in an area without access to childcare, which means we must be creative to allow me to keep my role on the farm as a working mom.

I often get frustrated that in rural areas, being a working mom is often a choice not awarded to many. I have watched many friends put their careers on hold until their children were old enough to go to school, simply because of the logistics involved. Where I live the closest daycare centres are in towns that are 30 to 40 kilometres away, and there are large rural areas competing for spots.

Please do not get me wrong: there is nothing wrong with being a stay-at-home mom. In fact, out here in rural Canada, my life would be so much easier if that was the role that made my heart sing, but I find I personally am a better mother and wife when I am able to work — and for me, that work is to farm.

Over the past four years, my husband and I have been working with both our parents to become much more streamlined and supported in working together. My mom, who lives two provinces away, comes out during seeding and harvest to help with the girls. My mother-in-law does a lot of the cooking. I help my mom to not get overwhelmed by bringing the girls with me in the equipment for parts of the day, and I spend days making freezer meals before busy seasons to help my mother-in-law with the cooking.

It is a juggling act that we are still working on perfecting, and even with all the help from our parents there are still very hard days and moments — times when we are all spread too thin, times when the girls are upset and tired and don't want to come with us to the field. There are tears from stress and from feeling like I am failing as a mother, or thoughts that I am selfish in my determination to keep my role

on the farm even though I have littles.

I know that childcare is a struggle everywhere across Canada.

It would be such an amazing resource to have childcare in my little rural community, but unfortunately I do not think it is something I will be seeing anytime soon, even though there are a group of moms working hard to try to make it happen. The impression left upon me over the last couple years is that it is expected for the wife, once children are born, to be the primary caregiver, and to put one's career on hold at least until the children are old enough to go to school.

I know that childcare is a struggle everywhere across Canada, and I am fully aware that if I had remained living and working in the city it would still be a struggle to find a daycare that had space (let alone balancing the costs associated with it). But I'd gladly take on those challenges if it meant at least having the option of sending my girls to childcare.

I love being a mom, and I also love being a farmer. I simply want the confidence of knowing I won't have to give up my role on my farm just because I have two beautiful little girls who depend on me.

Region: Saskatchewan ^[3]

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