

Child care and farming become a trade-off for Rogersville couple

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Author: Yard, Bridget

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EXCERPTS

Rébeka Frazer-Chiasson and Kevin Arseneau grow organic vegetables, strawberries, and meat on their farm, and they're growing one four-month-old baby as well — their son Hugo.

Frazer-Chiasson is the sixth generation to farm her family's land in Rogersville, together with her partner Arseneau.

The couple doesn't qualify for New Brunswick's Day Care Assistance Program because, despite their low salaries, they own their own business - La Ferme Terre Partagée - and employ one other worker.

"If we really wanted [Rébeka] to do maternity leave she could have taken an unpaid parental leave and we'd have to have an employee. That brings up the cost and brings down the not-so glamorous profits," said Arseneau

To remedy the problem, the couple is looking for a little help from their friends.

They're trading vegetables for child care.

"We exchanged people's time to do the preserving for our vegetables, and that was awesome for us and we benefited from that," said Frazer-Chiasson.

"So when we were faced with another challenge of how to do the work we need to do now with a child in tow, we thought 'Well, maybe there's still people interested in vegetables!'

The couple posted the idea to their Facebook page last month and have received several offers of help already.

"So far it has all been people that we are very comfortable with. We would probably start with just an hour around the farm and us if we didn't know them well," said Frazer-Chiasson.

'There's always a plan A and a plan B'

While some neighbours and friends have offered to help care for Hugo while his parents work the land, most of his time is spent in a carrier, strapped to one of his parents.

"There's always a plan A, and a plan B. Plan A often involves 'Ok, I'm going to take the stroller to the field and hopefully by then he'll have fallen asleep,'" said Frazer-Chiasson.

"Plan B is, 'OK, I'll have the carrier and it's gonna be too difficult to do the transplanting I'd planned ... but I'll do the weeding."

There is no typical day as an independent farmer, but the couple tries to plan out the weeks as much as possible.

They wake up with Hugo, and after feeding him, get to work as soon as possible, baby in tow.

"We try to have our schedule for the week laid out and every day we say, 'Who is doing something that Hugo could go with that person?' said Arseneau,

"Yesterday I had a meeting," he said. "We send him to all the meetings!" Frazer-Chiasson jumped in.

The farm's name, "Ferme Terre Partagée," means "shared land." The couple is committed to what they call "the sharing economy," meaning shared childcare, in this case.

The couple's Facebook post reads "this summer we will exchange fruits and vegetables for time spent with Hugo."

They will continue to experiment with child care options as day care continues to be out of reach financially.

Arseneau sums up the experience so far: "Everyday is bring your kid to work day."

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