

## No turning back as the world Zooms

This face-to-face contact with humans is overrated

By Lee Hart

If there is one legacy this pandemic will leave us, we may never need to get out of our sweatpants, or leave the house again.

In fact, there may never be a good excuse to have live face-to-face contact with another human being (other than immediate family members) ever again. I've never been Zoomed so many times for conference calls, field days, association business meetings and family visits than I have been in the past six weeks. And as of writing this in mid-May, there is no immediate end in sight.

I was getting my head around more electronic commerce and social media stuff before the pandemic, but since about the middle of March it has become a way of life. I don't know what it was like out in the country, but here in the city virtually anything you want can be ordered online and delivered to your door — books, clothing, food, you name it and it arrives on your doorstep.

The video conference calls — Zoom is just one of the platforms that can be used — have replaced just about every live meeting. With my first Zoom call, I was just so pleased with myself that I figured out the technology. It's not quite the same as talking to someone in person but it works, and Zoom can have its perks.

As the pandemic deepened, the Canadian Cattlemen's Association has had regular video conference calls to update the media and beef producers on what's happening in the beef industry.

The Canola Council of Canada and Canadian Canola Growers Association started their online conference calls last year, to keep people updated on the market situation with China — those calls continue during COVID-19 days.

The Alberta Barley and Wheat Commissions post an extensive newsletter on their website to inform farmers of COVID-19 issues and developments. And along with that they have replaced live field days for at least part of the summer with webinar field days through May and June — videos with one-hour presentations by specialists on weed control, crop pests, crop fertility and plant growth regulators, for example, followed by question and answer periods.

Similarly, Farming Smarter, an applied research association in southern Alberta, is live-streaming its regular summer field days through June and popular Field School in early July. You don't have to ride the jarring, hot, dusty, carry-all wagon in the field to look at plots — just stay seated in a comfortable chair at home. We will miss out on what is usually an excellent lunch, but there may be a way to get that delivered.

And I've even heard rumours that some of the larger outdoor farm shows later this year will go ahead as virtual events. I'm not exactly sure how that will work ... it is going to be really hard to fill a bag with pens, ball caps, rain gauges and other free loot from the various exhibitors online, but hopefully they come up with something.

Even in my personal life, Zoom meetings work pretty well. With family spread out over three households in Calgary, we have done some Zooming to keep in touch. My daughter makes occasional FaceTime calls, so I can say "hello" to grandson Issac. Although at 15 months of age, Issac isn't really interested in looking at some old guy on a phone screen. He'd rather play with the buttons, which usually ends the call abruptly.

And I have been Zooming in on some regular association meetings in Calgary. Zoom works reasonably well for volunteer organizations to keep up to date and make important business decisions. I got annoyed with another committee member the other day on a Zoom call, so I shut my video feed off, so all anyone could see was a black window where my face should have been. I was making a statement — I showed them!

I even had a doctor's appointment via Zoom the other day. It saved me a one-hour round trip across the city. The doctor was able to ask all the important questions, fortunately he wasn't able to perform any of those invasive procedures that are largely unnecessary and I was able to lie about my weight without fear of being caught. So, overall, I'm thinking this Zoom is a pretty good thing.