

Timothy Kayhart
West Addison dairy farmer
Interviewed for Mountain Lake PBS on July 14, 2011

“My name is Timothy Kayhart and I’m a dairy farmer in partnership with my brother Steve. We milk approximately 600 cows, 1700 acres between New York and Vermont and I’m mostly the crop and machinery person and he’s more the cattle person.

I think the major positives that I draw off from being a farmer in the area down here is the pride of growing feed and crops from the land and turning it into a product that we feed animals that produce milk and just maintaining the beautiful landscape that’s all around us for locals and visitors to enjoy.

A vital link

The old bridge was used by us daily to do our farming activities in New York. The old bridge, it was probably daily that we crossed there because we have animals and a farm there that we rent in New York, a couple hundred animals over there. So there’s a daily crossing of the bridge for the feeding and the cleaning of the barn and animals and when we’re in the fields cropping, it could be tractors and harrows and corn planters and mowers and choppers and trucks. The wide equipment didn’t really fit that well over the old bridge so most generally when we had wide equipment, we’d have to send a person over on the other side of the bridge to stop traffic and so we could pass safely without meeting a car on the bridge and not being able to pass.

I guess my first feelings when I heard the bridge was going to be closed was kind of panic and how do we get from here to there safely and maintain the animals were the first and foremost concern, the feeding and well-being of the animals. The crop land kind of came second to being a concern and that’s kind of the initial, kind of was like panic.

I don’t really have any hard figures as to what it cost us. All I know is that it cost a lot. You know, there was in the beginning stages we had stashed a boat at a farm in Bridport. Then we were crossing the lake with a boat and a motor to prevent from going all the way around.

All the family parents, and brothers and kids...everyone attended the demolition. It was kind of a bitter-sweet day I think, sad to see such a historic structure come down in such a short time was kind of sad...but also was kind of like a new beginning to the next step, here we go, the bridge is down, let’s keep moving the ball forward. So, it was also optimism...one thing down onto the next.

Coping without the bridge

We've learned to live and exist with the ferry. I think the first summer with it was a lot of learning with it on how to plan and strategize people and equipment and time that it takes to do things.

The first year was a lot of learning how to operate with the ferry and after we kind of learned to deal with it and work around it. I wouldn't say it's become normal but it's kind of been not such a stressor to think about all of the effects of the ferry and things taking longer cause the window is only so big that we have to do what we need to do and it adds a lot of time.

With the old bridge, like I mentioned before, the narrowness of it, the crest of the hill was again dangerous because you never know what you're going to meet when you come over the top. Really no room for pedestrians whatsoever on the bridge and so when we have a fair amount of wide equipment because everything gets a little bit bigger and bigger and we'd have to stop traffic on the other side to cross the bridge. So we really look forward to having a newer structure that's a lot more conducive to pedestrians and agriculture and trucking and commercial, because it's a major, major artery for a lot of people.

Planning for the new bridge

I was personally kind of on the PAC committee[Lake Champlain Bridge Public Advisory Committee] with Bob Smith, up the road, another dairy farmer, to represent agriculture and make sure we kind of had a voice or so they could know our needs and wants and desires for the new bridge and I felt really good about being involved in it and kind of playing a part in the design of the new bridge, or what it should look like, or the widths of this and also with the ferry structures with the docks and the ramps and the widths that we needed for equipment and stuff was very, very important to being able to operate.

You know this past spring when we had record high lake levels, I thanked my lucky stars a million times that the states designed the ferry ramps systems to be adjustable to maintain operation with that amount of water in the lake and had they not been foresightful enough to plan for all sorts of situations...low water, high water, weights, widths, we would have been in the exact same situation two winters ago with no way to get across. So I personally, Lake Champlain Transportation and the people involved with the ferries, we feel they've done an unbelievable job at transporting thousands of people across this narrow point in a very professional manner. They've been great to work with.

I like the design [of the new Lake Champlain Bridge]. I think it's kind of similar to the old design with some arches and kind of a little bit. It blends in more with the mountains in the background...you know it maybe cost a little more than it could have or should have but I think it fits well with the landscape, rather than just a

plain Jane flat deck simple...kind of [bridge]...I think it kind of ought to go with the landscape and I think it does fit well.

The fact of the matter is that in our business is not the same that it was two years ago when we had a bridge and kind of like I said that farmers have always done, you just learn to do the best with what you got and you improvise, you overcome, you adapt, you just keep on fighting and make the best of what you have 'cause it's, it's the only thing you got to go with.

The best thing that happened was it getting condemned because it'd been a 10 year process without it... And if you think about it in the grand scheme of things, 10 years from now, it's just going to feel like a little speed bump.

Some of the old difficulties with the bridge that was there prior to the new one, the narrowness of the bridge was a big problem for us with the width of our equipment, needing to get over in a safe manner. We'd send people over, prior to crossing to stop traffic actually and allow the safe passage of mowers that were 15 feet wide , corn planters that are 15 feet wide, choppers, harrows and tractors with duals on it, just cause there's not enough room for a car and that tractor to go through. And the pedestrian traffic on the old bridge was extremely dangerous.

The feeling that I had seeing the old bridge go was I felt like it was pretty sad to see that much history and time and the work that went into building it and just sad that it didn't get maintained better. ...it was all gone in a matter of 10 seconds.

You know, one of the things that's come out of using the ferry, you know a dozen times a day or even if it's two or three times a day, is the community interaction with people that are not farmers that don't understand what we do, or what we're driving or what we're up to. It kind of became a situation where normal people could ask us 'hey what is that or what does that do and who are you and what are you doing and so it became kind of a point of contact for people that really don't know a lot about farming to kind of have a little bit of insight about it."