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Curtis was raised on a farm specializing in dairy and special crops in southeastern Manitoba. Education includes a B.Sc. and M.Sc. from the University of Manitoba, PhD obtained at the University of Guelph, and an MBA from Athabasca University / University of Guelph. Curtis has worked as a research scientist for Agriculture and Agrifood Canada, has taught at numerous Universities and community colleges in Canada, and has operated his own consulting company for 10 years, primarily providing business and marketing strategy and scientific counsel to Fortune 500 companies. In the corporate sector, Curtis worked for Monsanto for 8 years in R&D, corporate finance and business strategy and development. Prior to joining the Richardson Centre, Curtis worked as a senior consultant for Meyers, Norris, Penny focusing on commodity marketing, renewable energy, intellectual property protection, enterprise software applications, and scientific competitiveness.