



## Bringing the Internet to farm country

**BY JASON KIRBY** • The sturdy farm silo: ideal for keeping cattle feed dry, and, apparently, for accessing the latest video of young celebrities making fools of themselves, too.

While high-speed Internet is a luxury urban Canadians take for granted, that's not the case for many rural dwellers. Now a tiny family-run company is teaming up with farmers to install wireless transmitters on silos and grain elevators in parts of south-



**SILO Wireless's transmitters are sitting atop farmers' silos**

western Ontario. Cable is almost unheard of in the countryside, while Bell's repeated pledges to offer high-speed Internet through rural phone lines have yet to fully materialize. That's left residents barely two hours southwest of Toronto stuck with plodding dial-up. Even in Nantuxut, almost all residents can surf the Web

at a decent clip, but not in Ontario's farm country. "Rural Ontario is not so good compared to what's happening in other areas," says Toronto telecom consultant Iain Grant. "They're lucky that dial-up still works." There are options, such as building a 30-m tower in the backyard and attaching a wireless receiver to the top, but that's not practical for most.

Seeing an opportunity, Silo Wireless stepped in with the low-cost option of using agricultural structures to piggyback Internet signals from the nearby city of Brantford. In return, farmers get free Internet and a future cut of the profits. Silo is run by Andreas Wiatowski and his wife, Cynthia, who fled city life three years ago and officially launched their company in June. She does the billing, he handles installations. "It's not fair—in the city you have every option imaginable, but out here we're forgotten," says Cynthia. "It leaves a bad taste in peoples' mouths." Hence the steady stream of calls coming in. So far Silo has landed 150 customers and has a four-month backlog of orders. Small beans for big Internet providers, but the Wiatowskis are confident they can turn rural surfers into a thriving business.

Grant says using silos is an ingenious solution. "Now these people will know what everyone else is talking about," he says. ■