

Growing Tomorrow

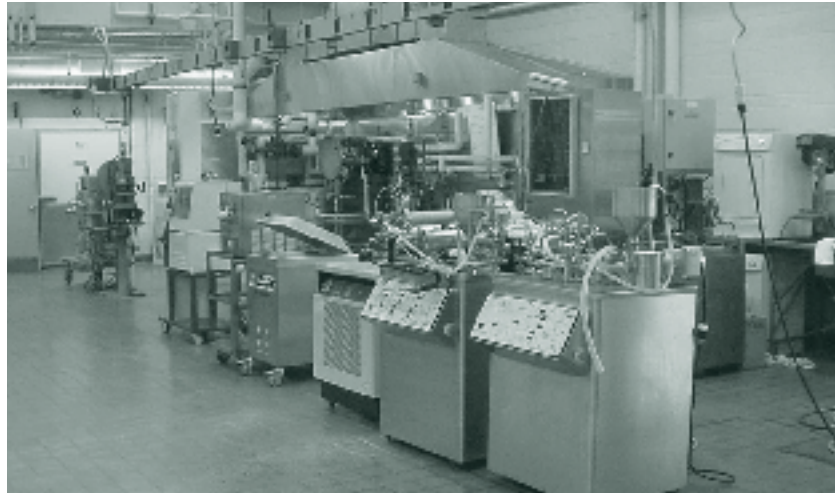
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Looking to Agri-Food Industry's Future

Where is the BC agri-food sector headed and what can the Investment Agriculture Foundation do to better direct its resources to areas of greatest benefit to keep the sector moving forward? Finding answers to these and other questions is at the heart of a new review-and-analysis project initiated by the Investment Agriculture Foundation.

Working with industry and government partners, the IAF has launched the Agri-Food Assessment and Strategic Issues Analysis Initiative (SIA) to develop forward-looking strategies that address critical opportunities and challenges facing the industry. Extensive consultations are planned

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Pilot Plant, BCIT Technology Centre – Facilities for commercializing value-added research.

ACAAF Funds Flow to BC Producers

British Columbia's production and processing sector is the beneficiary of a five-year federal funding package worth \$8.5 million to help implement new projects and bolster its capacity to address current and emerging issues.

The newly minted Advancing Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food (ACAAF) Program, successor to the Canadian Adaptation and Rural Development (CARD) fund, announced its allotments to 14 industry-led councils across Canada in early November. BC's annual share of \$1.7 million will be delivered through the Investment Agriculture Foundation.

"I'm confident this will help the industry councils to continue their strong track record of helping to drive a wide range of regional projects," said Andy Mitchell, Canada's Agriculture and Agri-Food minister. "These investments will help support a profitable and sustainable future for producers and their local communities." Proposed projects are considered under ACAAf's three "pillars", developed after extensive consultations. Pillar One supports industry-led projects that test approaches and solutions in furtherance of Agricultural Policy Framework objectives. Projects that foster development of value-added

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Agri-Food Industry's Future *continued*

with the objectives of:

- Providing an understanding of critical industry, market and competitive issues that will allow industry, government and the IAF to strategically direct their resources to those areas of greatest long-term sector benefit.
- Providing forward-looking analysis of trends and emerging issues that industry sectors can use for creating innovative business development strategies and that government can use in regulatory and policy reform.
- Providing a focal point for industry groups to share priorities and develop common approaches for enhancing their competitive capacity and long-term success.
- Communicating findings of the SIA broadly within the BC agri-food sector and encouraging stakeholder action to address their priority strategic issues.

A blue-ribbon advisory committee and a steering committee – comprised of IAF, BC Agriculture Council, BC Food Processors Association and government partners – are providing overall direction and guidance of the project. An initial meeting held in mid-October discussed the objectives and project requirements.

“The Investment Agriculture Foundation recognized the benefit of having a current review of the external environment of the agri-food sector to identify areas where we can help advance the sector, and we’ve dedicated staff and resources to make it happen,” said IAF chair Walt Goerzen.

The Foundation’s goal is to have the SIA final report completed and a joint action plan prepared by fall 2005. The report will serve as a blueprint for IAF funding priorities. ■

ACAAF Funds *continued*

opportunities by commercializing research are funded under Pillar Two. Pilot plant facilities, such as at BCIT, can provide industry with commercialization options. Pillar Three supports projects that gather, analyze and share information to assist a sector’s ability to shape its own future.

“Our priority focus is helping our BC industry be strategic in creating a strong future for the sector,” said Walt Goerzen, IAF chair. “The new ACAA program will play an important role in achieving that goal.”

The five-year, \$255-million ACAA Program, launched in April 2004, aims at positioning Canada’s agriculture and agri-food industry at the leading edge to seize new market opportunities. Creating partnerships and new strategic alliances among sector groups are key ACAA features, and the program continues CARD’s cooperative approach to funding projects at the national, multi-regional and regional level. ■



Left to right: Kent Antoniak, Chris Antoniak, and Frank Plut at George Little Ranch in Knutsford BC.

A Strategy to Beef Up Sales

Practical solutions for selling more Canadian beef to counter BSE-created export restrictions is the goal of a new national strategy developed by Canadian cattlemen and joint funded by nine provincial CARD councils.

With export restrictions affecting ranchers, packers and consumers alike, the Beef Information Centre (BIC) Commercial Beef Utilization Strategy represents a collaborative effort to market more beef in Canada. It aims to increase the share of domestic supply to the commercial beef market, increase the size of the domestic market, and add value to beef products through new product innovation.

“The BSE situation has taken a toll on Canada’s cattle industry,” said federal Agriculture and Agri-Food Minister Andy Mitchell.

“The successful positioning of the industry requires the full commitment of governments as much as the industry’s support.”

Proposed activities of the Beef Utilization Strategy include: strategy development and program management, commercial beef safety research and tracking studies, quality and safety resource technology transfer, a commercial beef products guide, product development and reformulation partners program, commercial beef market development at food service, quick service restaurant initiatives and retail source ground beef programs.

“This strategy is extremely important for producers in BC and Canada,” said Mark Nairn, President of the BC Cattlemen’s

A Strategy to Beef Up Sales *continued*

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Association. “The closure of export markets for older cattle makes it essential for our industry to develop new products and markets for these cows. It is critical for the economic stability of BC ranchers.”

The Beef Information Centre, marketing division of the Canadian Cattlemen’s Association, will work with the manufacturing, food service and retail sectors to implement the strategy. The BIC uses an integrated approach, directly focusing programs on five key areas: improving the quality and consistency of beef, increasing beef’s convenience, expanding the use and

value of all cuts, improving food safety, and improving consumers’ perceptions about beef’s healthfulness and wholesomeness.

As Canada’s largest beef producer, Alberta, through the Agriculture and Food Council, is providing over half the total CARD funding support of \$2.5 million. The Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC is supporting the strategy with a proportional contribution of \$162,000.

For more information on BIC programs visit www.beefinfo.org ■

Seminars a Profitable Experience

Food processing companies are learning how to grow their businesses and sharpen their competitive edge with the help of a series of workshops held across BC.

The “Concept to Commerce: Finding a Path to Profitability” seminars provide smaller-sized food and beverage processors with information on programs and services available to their companies. A component of the Food and Beverage Processing Industry Initiative – funded by the Investment Agriculture Foundation through the Agri-Food Futures Fund – the workshops were developed after a survey of BC processors identified access to capital as a top priority.

With a theme of “Tomorrow’s success is the result of planning and investing today”, participants at well-attended seminars in Richmond, Kelowna, Chilliwack and in Duncan heard from people in the industry about practical ways to increase profitability and how to access a variety of programs and services.

“There are far more resources available than most processors are aware,” said Rick Pipes, President of Merridale Ciderworks and a

director of the BC Food Processors Association. “Help is available if you know where to look.”

Learning where to look is one of the main outcomes of the workshops. Participants were introduced to the \$1.5 million BC Food and Beverage Processing Industry Initiative, financing programs, business planning and development services, technical services, innovation support, and export development services. These resources are available to most food and beverage processors – from start-ups to large enterprises.

The BC Food Processors Association and BC Functional Food and Nutraceutical Network (contact: info@bcfn2.com) co-hosted the workshops. ■



Seminar in Duncan, BC. Left to Right Seated at Table – Gordon Brown, Maureen Drew, Frank Appleyard, Maureen Young.

Emily MacNair: Making Projects Run Smoothly

A straightforward, smooth-functioning reporting system for industry clients is the top priority for our new program



analyst. Emily MacNair has joined the Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC as an analyst working with the Performance and Evaluation Committee.

The committee’s members are responsible for monitoring the progress of projects including their activities and deliverables, budgeting and expense reporting, and approval of funding disbursement. Emily is working directly with the board and our clients to implement a new, streamlined reporting system, with the goal of making reporting easier and the process as uncomplicated as possible.

Emily also serves as administrator for the Agri-Food Futures Fund’s Food Quality and Safety and the Food and Beverage Processing Industry initiatives. In this capacity, she works with industry groups to help prepare applications and report on project progress. She also develops and administers project contracts and contribution agreements, and coordinates and administers the activities of the two adjudication committees.

Please welcome Emily to the IAF – we’re happy to have her! ■

Wanted: Workers With the Right Skills

To one degree or another, all agriculture industries face the problem of recruiting and employing enough workers with the right skills to meet production needs. A new collaborative initiative is trying to help BC agriculture producers find answers.

The BC Agriculture Council (BCAC) and the Agriculture Labour Partnership Committee are joining in an Agriculture Labour Market and Skills Development Initiative (ALMSDI) that outlines a proactive, responsive approach to achieving long-term labour market stability.

The initiative's strategic plan outlines goals and actions that focus on the labour market's key attributes, while providing a framework for managing and preventing future labour shortages. Major challenges identified by ALMSDI include:

- A greater understanding of the key skill gaps within the agriculture sector and analysis of where future skill gaps will emerge.
- Improving the image of employment in the sector.
- Alignment of regulatory requirements with the production model used in agriculture.
- Greater understanding of why the sector faces chronic job vacancies.
- Leadership capacity within the sector.
- Ensuring that public agencies and training bodies

are able to keep pace with the rate of change in the sector.

Five hundred thousand dollars over three years has been committed for implementation of the strategic plan. The plan sets out a series of actions to achieve a balanced approach and a roadmap to labour stability. Proposed actions include pilot and research projects, educational campaigns, career awareness products, monitoring tools, training and apprenticeship programs, and employer workshops and toolkits.

"Labour market supply and skills development is a critical factor in continuing to move our sector forward, and I'm hopeful we'll provide useful tools and support to address key challenges through this initiative," said BCAC chair Dick Klein Geltink. "This is an excellent example of a coordinated approach to program delivery that will benefit the industry."

ALMSDI falls under the Agri-Food Futures Fund, the cost-sharing trust fund whose goals are the development and sustainability of the agri-food industry in British Columbia.

For more information visit http://www.bcac.ca/agriculture_labour_skills_programs.htm ■

Application Deadlines

Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit proposals well in advance of the following deadlines.

January 4 • February 24 • April 5 • May 10, 2005

Overview of Projects Funded

The Foundation is a non-profit organization that invests funds to help the agri-food industry adapt, diversify and grow.

Summary of total funding committed by the Foundation to October 31, 2004.

Canadian Adaptation and Rural Development	\$8.63 Million	<i>For a detailed listing of approved projects please check out the foundation website www.iafbc.ca/project.listing.htm</i>
Agri-Food Futures Fund	\$14.61 Million	
Safety Net Companion Program	\$7.45 Million	

Funding for the Investment Agriculture Foundation of British Columbia is provided by:

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