

Growing Tomorrow

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Partnership Yields Success For Natural Health Products Industry

Natural health products are among the fastest growing product categories in Canada. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada recently announced a \$721,000 investment in the Nutri-Net Canada Project to help expand market opportunities for the Canadian functional foods and natural health products industry.

Natural health products include supplements which, in many cases, are made from traditional or specialty crops, seafood and aquaculture. Functional foods are similar in appearance to, or are conventional foods, that have benefits and can help to reduce the risk of chronic disease.

The Nutri-Net Canada Project will bring together public and private sector

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Helping industry adapt

Helping British Columbia's producers, processors, agribusiness and rural communities adapt, diversify and grow is IAF's mission. To highlight these aims, we are dedicating three issues of Growing Tomorrow to each of these three areas. In the last issue, we started with "grow" and looked at projects IAF supported to help agriculture and agri-food grow in BC.

In this issue, we're taking a closer look at "adapt." Changes are coming at industry from all directions. How can IAF help industry be ready to take advantage of changes in the environment, in the economy and in government regulations? What can IAF do to help industry find solutions to emerging issues and adjust to new ways of doing business?

Being able to adapt is all about identifying new conditions or surroundings and then adjusting to them in an effort to survive and thrive. Helping industry to adapt is at the heart of many of the projects we support. We've highlighted just a few on the following pages. Take inspiration in what other sectors are doing and then contact one of our program managers to discuss the issues facing your sector and find out what can be done to meet the new conditions. They are available to work with you.

Next time, we'll take a closer look at diversification... ■

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stakeholders from across Canada to develop a national strategy and action plan for accelerating the growth of the Canadian functional food and natural health products industry. Through case studies, regional and national workshops and conferences, and a nation-wide industry networking website the project will provide an in-depth understanding of the sector and lay a solid foundation for building a sustainable national network of the Canadian functional food and natural health products industry.

The project is administered by the Canadian Health Food Association (CHFA) on behalf of the coalition of functional food and natural health products organizations known as Nutri-Net Canada. Members of the Nutri-Net Canada steering committee include representatives of organizations and institutions supported by the governments of British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick. In addition to AAFC funds, the project will receive over \$900,000 in financial and in-kind contributions from industry, bringing the total budget for all activities to over \$1.6 million.

AAFC funding to Nutri-Net Canada is being provided through the Science and Innovation Broker Program under the Agricultural Policy Framework. The Broker Program supports “broker” and producer organizations working with industry, government and universities to foster strategic innovation opportunities. More information about the Broker Program is available at www.agr.gc.ca/broker-courtage. ■

Beef Producers Offering Top Quality with Confidence

From spinach to pet food, food safety has become an important public issue. Consumers are more aware than ever about food safety and quality, putting pressure on producers to guarantee a safe product that they can sell to retailers.

The Verified Beef Production Program evolved out of food safety and quality goals in the mid-1990s from the Quality Starts Here program. The VBP Program is a national market-driven voluntary on-farm safety program that allows producers to integrate the principles of Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) into their daily management practices, enabling preventative safety measures. Additionally, producers can now phase the program in at their own pace to be prepared if and when there is a market requirement.

Other benefits to producers include a better understanding of food safety risks and the use of medications and improved production efficiency. Additionally, this producer-developed program reduces the potential for government regulations with its pro-active approach.

Annette Moore, the Provincial Coordinator for the VBP Program, emphasizes the good work that producers are already doing. “The majority of producers are not getting credit for

their good work. This program tries to verify this good work...to get [producers] recognition and pass this confidence on to buyers.”

A two year pilot project was launched in 2004 by the British Columbia VBP Management Group – consisting of the BC Cattlemen’s Association, BC Breeders and Feeders Association and the BC Association of Cattle Feeders – to increase awareness of the VBP program. The goal of the project was to have 10% of BC beef producers attend a VBP workshop. By the completion of the pilot in January 2006, 315 of approximately 1,500 producers had completed the VBP orientation process, surpassing the initial goal substantially. To date, there are 17 registered producers in BC.

A farm, feedlot or ranch that is registered under the Verified Beef Production program has attended a VBP training workshop, has implemented the required components of the program, is using a clear record-keeping system, and has successfully completed an on-farm audit.

Due to the success of the pilot, in March 2006 the program was expanded to include more regional trainers and auditors, to explore the possibility of cross-commodity sharing of training and auditing, to develop an audit tracking and management system and to evaluate the implementation process. The program is slated to run until March 2009, with funding provided by the BC VBP Management Group, the Agri-Food Futures Fund Food Quality and Safety Initiative (FSQI), the Beef Cattle Industry Development Fund and West Coast Reduction Ltd.

The FSQI provides funding assistance for farmers in BC to develop and deliver educational and awareness programs primarily to BC’s food producers and processors. Funding for the FSQI is provided through the Agri-Food Futures Fund, a joint program of the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. FSQI funds are held in trust with IAF. ■



Bar K Ranch, Prince George. The Verified Beef Production Program helps enhance the marketability of Canadian beef by verifying the safety and quality of ranchers’ daily management practices. Photo credit: BC Verified Beef Production Program

Purebred Sheep Breeders Adapting to International Markets

In April 2006, the British Columbia Purebred Sheep Breeders' Association completed a two-year project to genotype the BC purebred sheep flock with the aim of increasing its resistance to scrapie.

Scrapie is a fatal disease that affects the central nervous system of sheep and goats. Found all over the world, scrapie is known as a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE), similar to mad cow disease in cattle, chronic wasting disease in deer and elk and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in humans.

"Science has found a gene in sheep that is totally resistant to scrapie," explains Judith Glibbery, the project coordinator. "The goal of this project was to genotype purebred sheep in BC to see if they have this gene."

Gathering genetic information allows breeders to develop breeding management strategies that will increase scrapie resistance in their flocks without sacrificing performance. "Ideally, we'd like farmers to keep their best animals while slowly introducing the resistant gene into the flock," said Glibbery.

Developing scrapie-resistant sheep flocks not only relieves the government from the financial burden of eliminating infected animals, it will also have a direct impact on the sale of BC purebred sheep. The United States plans to become scrapie-resistant by 2010 and scrapie-free by 2017, and many countries, including those in the EU, are also engaged in genotyping. Comprehensive genotyping programs will allow the Canadian industry to compete internationally.

"Since the border closed after the BSE scare, we have not been able to ship breeding stock (ewes and rams) into or out of the US which has been

extremely hard on our industry," said Glibbery. "Hopefully, BC purebred sheep will soon be able to cross an open border and BC scrapie-resistant sheep will then be more valuable than ever."

Glibbery says that the project achieved all of its goals. They genotyped 2,400 sheep, putting the information into what is now a national database. Using the results of the genotyping, farmers were given breeding management strategies to raise the level of resistance to scrapie in their individual flocks.

IAF contributed \$139,800, or 87% of the costs of this project and the sheep industry contributed the balance. "It's just not financially workable for our sheep farmers to pay for this kind of testing," said Glibbery. "That's why we went to IAF. This project really gave the breeders a financial helping hand."

"The sheep industry in Canada is small compared to other livestock industries and consequently has not commanded the attention the larger industries do. Despite this, our national sheep industry is growing every year and with the sale of high quality Canadian lamb to the Canadian public growing every year as well, our future is optimistic." ■



Judith Glibbery and her purebred Romneys on her farm in Armstrong, BC. Photo credit: Wayne Glibbery

Helping Associations Adapt

In response to the increasing responsibilities of agriculture associations, IAF funding is helping the BC Council of Marketing Boards (COMB) to provide professional development training to directors and officers of industry organizations.

According to Jack Wessel, COMB's secretary, the project (to which IAF is contributing \$55,000) has been a huge success. "The program has set high standards and achieved results beyond our original expectations," he said. "The original intent was to provide training for 175 people over three years. The program has now been extended for a fourth year but after three years we have already provided training for 350 people."

COMB's project aims to improve the skill level for directors and staff of agricultural associations and marketing boards through training courses aimed specifically at association duties and responsibilities.

"Being a director or officer of an organization requires different information and skills than operating a farm enterprise," Wessel adds. "Agricultural organizations have become increasingly complex. Many are now delivering services that were formerly delivered by governments and their decisions can have a significant impact on industries and individuals."

Focusing on organizational governance, financial management and administrative justice, the training will help boards to understand and deal effectively with decision-making, expenditures and their responsibilities to members. ■

Integrating Agriculture and the Environment

News Briefs

1500th Environmental Farm Plan

In BC, 1,500 farms have completed Environmental Farm Plans (EFPs). EFPs are assessments that help farmers identify environmental risks in their operations and develop and implement mitigation strategies. The program is funded under the Agriculture Policy Framework Agreement and is delivered by the British Columbia Agriculture Council.

Open for Business

Two Agri-Food Futures Fund initiatives are seeking applications from industry: the Cultivated Mushroom Industry Initiative and the BC Agri-Tourism Initiative. Both initiatives are now administered by IAF. Contact Jessica Ng at (250) 356-1839 for more information or visit our website www.iafbc.ca and click on "Funding Available."

Now Online

Visit our website at www.iafbc.ca to read our Annual Report and Corporate Plan. Click on "Publications and Resources."

New Employee

April 1, 2007, Rick Van Kleeck joined IAF as staff. Rick, who has been on secondment from the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands (MAL) since May 2005, is coordinator of the Livestock Waste Tissue Initiative and is based in Abbotsford. More information about the initiative is available at www.iafbc.ca/livestock. ■

In British Columbia, wildlife habitat and agriculture often coexist and such a relationship can have deep impacts on farmers and wildlife alike. That is why farmers in BC are developing integrated strategies to manage their relationship to wildlife. The goal is to contribute to the health of industry while supporting stewardship and to expedite industry actions towards enhancing environmental values. Here are some examples of what is being done.

In the Comox Valley, larger and larger flocks of Trumpeter Swans are threatening the integrity of farmers' fields. To address this problem, the Comox Valley Farmers' Institute is working with Ducks Unlimited Canada to implement a management strategy to mitigate the impact of waterfowl. By improving field drainage, planting lure crops, and utilizing "hazing" techniques such as dogs and noise devices, farmers hope to dissuade the swans from flocking to their fields.

In the Fraser Valley, blueberry farmers' crops are threatened by flocks of starlings, crows and song birds that consume these valuable fruit. Despite the availability of noise devices to deter birds from the fields,

not all are affordable or readily available. Moreover, noise devices can be significantly disruptive to neighbours. Currently, the BC Blueberry Council is working with farmers to develop integrated approaches on an individual basis which combine the use of auditory and visual techniques. "Since this program has started, we have seen growers and neighbours understand each other better," said Nazam Dulat, advisor for the BC Blueberry Council integrated bird management project. "And we have seen a reduction in complaints about bird scare devices."

Wildlife management isn't just about deterring problematic fauna, however. In Surrey, the Salmon Habitat Rehabilitation Program (SHaRP) has been working with farmers to integrate environmental and agricultural needs through livestock exclusion fencing, community education and invasive plant and debris removal along salmon streams. Through this project, sensitive habitats can be preserved while maintaining cattle farmers' herds. Installation of exclusion fencing along riparian edges has addressed some unusual problems, such as ensuring new-born calves do not need to be rescued from the muddy banks of a creek.



Integrated management strategies help farmers in the Comox Valley keep birds such as these Trumpeter Swans at bay. Photo credit

Back in the Fraser Valley, the Sustainable Poultry Farming Group launched a water quality project to address the problem of groundwater contamination from localized application of poultry manure in the area of the Abbotsford Sumas aquifer. The project worked to ascertain alternate uses of poultry manure and to identify and capitalize on markets for manure in the BC Interior. On another front, public and industry awareness for air quality issues associated with poultry farming are being addressed through adapting concepts or technologies to reduce potential environmental impacts.

All projects were funded through the Agriculture Environment Partnership Initiative (AEPI) and the Agricultural Environment Stewardship Initiative (AESI). More information can be found at www.iafbc.ca by clicking on "Funding Available." ■



: Ducks Unlimited Canada.

The British Columbia beekeeping industry is comprised of approximately 2,200 producers operating some 43,000 honeybee colonies throughout the province. Beekeeping is practiced in all agricultural areas and in selected forest areas with seasonal nectar and pollen sources. In BC there are more than 20 local beekeeper clubs and associations, many of which are affiliated with the BC Honey Producers Association (BCHPA).

In 2005, the BCHPA accessed funds through the Agri-Food Futures Fund to support the development of a strong and viable beekeeping industry in BC and the Beekeeping Industry Development Initiative (BIDI) was born.

BIDI's mandate is to represent the industry as a whole to achieve their main goals of:

- Enabling beekeepers to access training and development expertise;
- Increasing market share for BC beekeepers in all product categories;
- Improving communication and encouraging more cooperation among beekeepers; and
- Demonstrating to both the public and other agricultural sectors, the economic value the beekeeping industry.

In 2006, BIDI awarded its first grant to the BC Bee Breeders Association to find and develop bees that both perform well in BC and show some resistance to varroa mites; and to distribute the resulting stock to BC beekeepers. The bee breeders received \$56,350 for trials that will be conducted over three years.

With \$143,000 still available through BIDI, projects under consideration for the upcoming year include the funding of promotional material to educate the public about honey production and health benefits.

Dave Johnson, BIDI chair, says that other potential projects include a series of seminars around different aspects of beekeeping. "There is a gap in the general knowledge of beekeepers in terms of production, processing and marketing of alternative hive products



Joe Scullion inspects the honeybees from one of his private hobby colonies in Victoria. Photo credit: Erin Riley

like propolis, bee venom and royal jelly," he says. "The seminars would be held in different areas of the province in order to be accessible to as many beekeepers as possible." Johnson also emphasizes the need for introducing young people to the art and science of keeping bees, perhaps at the community college level.

Johnson says that the involvement of the BCHPA, the innovation shown by individual beekeepers and the support of IAF is giving the industry a "maturity and independence which bode well for the future." ■

Understanding Dairy Cow Fertility



The research team at UBC aims to understand cow pregnancy rates in order to reduce the cull rate of cows that don't produce enough milk or get pregnant after their first calf.

Photo credit: Miriam Gordon

Over the last 50 years, as milk production in dairy cows has increased, the pregnancy rate after the first insemination in postpartum cows has declined from 60% to 25%. In the case of heifers (cows that have not yet been bred), the pregnancy rate after the first insemination remains unchanged over the same period.

Currently, IAF is funding a project at the University of British Columbia Dairy Education Research Centre to investigate why this drop in fertility has occurred and to look for solutions.

"In order to understand this problem, we are comparing parameters between heifers and cows looking at embryo quality, uterine environments and hormone levels," said Dr. Raja Rajamahendran, a professor in UBC's faculty of land and food systems and the principle investigator on the project.

According to Rajamahendran, this project could potentially bring enormous benefits to the dairy industry.

"Normally, post-partum cows breed 60 to 90 days after their last calving," he said. "Every day that calving is delayed beyond 12.5 months costs the farmer \$4.70 per cow per day. That amounts to a \$25 million loss in BC and Alberta alone."

While the current average cull rate for cows that don't produce enough milk or don't get pregnant is 33%, improving the pregnancy rate will lower the cull rate.

Research began in January 2007, and is planned to run until December 2008. This project is funded by IAF and its sister councils in seven other provinces. IAF is contributing \$20,925, the other councils are contributing \$6,975 each. Westgen (BC's artificial insemination centre) is contributing \$11,250. ■

Chicken Industry Launches New Teaching Tool

The BC Chicken Growers' Association (BCCGA) unveiled the How It's Grown Poultry Barn at the Pacific Agriculture Show in Abbotsford last February.

Designed for public education at fairs and schools, the barn is a portable mini-



barn built on a flatbed trailer. It features live chickens, housed as they would be on a real farm, with a plexiglass wall revealing the barn's inner workings.

Art Penner, a BCCGA director, says they came up with the project as a way to increase public awareness of chicken production and to reduce negative perceptions of the chicken industry.

"Since avian influenza, biosecurity concerns have made public farm visits much tougher. With the portable barn, we can take the farm to the public to show them how we raise chickens and to dispel myths that people have heard about chicken production."

At the Pacific Agriculture Show, Penner says that the response to the barn was very positive. "The amount of questions

people asked was really encouraging. People wanted to know how the chickens were raised, what we feed them. One person looked at it and asked when we had gotten rid of the cages, but chickens aren't generally grown in cages... People hear things from different sources that are not true. Without seeing it people may believe something that is totally wrong."

This summer, the How It's Grown Poultry Barn will tour BC to fairs and agricultural shows. Penner hopes that next year they will take the barn to schools to teach young people about the chicken production industry.

IAF contributed half of the funding to the \$35,000 project, the other half was supplied by BCCGA and by the BC Broiler Hatching Egg Commission. ■

Emphasis on Strategic Approaches

Recently, two IAF-funded projects have been completed which helped industry to adapt to changing demands in a more strategic manner. The BC Raspberry Industry Development Council and the United Flower Growers Co-operative Association have taken the initiative in developing industry-wide strategic plans. Emphasising the need for communication among industry members and between industry and policy makers, the identification of future goals and priorities, the capture of market development opportunities and the efficient use of available resources, both industries addressed the basic question of where they want to go and how they will get there.

Raspberry Industry Responds to Global Demand

The British Columbia raspberry industry is entering an extremely challenging period. BC represents 3% of the global raspberry market and, due to current production emphasis on industrial (processed) raspberries, it has become

dependent on global market pressures of supply and demand from major raspberry production areas, such as Chile, Serbia and Poland. The IAF contributed \$7,500 to the development of the BC Raspberry Industry Strategic Plan, which was completed in December 2006. This plan is intended to outline a strategy to facilitate the sustainability of the BC raspberry industry in the new context of the global economy through focussed and effective use of resources by the BC RIDC.

Floriculture Will Flourish with New Plan

The IAF has also contributed \$15,448 towards the development of a similar strategic plan for the floriculture industry. The United Flower Growers Co-operative Association has undertaken to address current issues facing the floriculture industry, such as increasing industry regulations, rising costs of production and declining market prices. The project focuses on three strategic directions: issues management, partnerships and communications. By increasing and improving relationships with other industry members and policy makers, it is anticipated that the entire BC floriculture industry will benefit from the strategic plan, establishing a framework for future directions and maximizing the use of resources to manage and address issues of mutual concern.

Two years ago, the IAF partially funded the development of a similar plan for the BC cranberry industry. Jack Wessell, manager of the BC Cranberry Marketing Commission says that “the IAF funding has allowed [the BC cranberry industry] to put a plan in place to address all of the elements of the plan and to meet new challenges and opportunities as they arise. We are already seeing excellent participation from industry.” ■

Islands Agri-Food Initiative Open for Business

The Islands Agri-Food Initiative is an industry-led program that funds projects that ensure a diverse, sustainable and viable agri-food sector on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands.

In 2005, the initiative contributed \$6,000 to the Island Farmers' Alliance for a one-day Poultry in Motion seminar held at Providence Farm in Duncan. The 72 participants explored opportunities created by the BC Chicken Marketing Board's new entrant program, resulting in 54 applications for quota.

An eight-month study of commercial produce production on Salt Spring Island received \$8,500 from the initiative in 2005. With the goal of increasing Salt Spring's food self-sufficiency, the study included surveying of commercial produce farmers, mapping farmland, and interviewing retailers, restaurant owners and consumers. The results of this study have since been used to support agricultural planning for the island.

The initiative is also contributing \$135,000 to the Comox Valley Farmers' Institute for forage demonstration trials. The island's livestock industry depends on climatically adapted forage species, but it's costly for farmers to test new species. The overall objective of the project is to provide island farmers with a risk-free way to evaluate new forage types, varieties and planting techniques.

The \$1.675 million initiative is part of the Agri-Food Futures Fund. Administration of the initiative has recently been brought under IAF and applications are being accepted. Funding is available to island-based groups for education, research and development projects. For more information, please contact Jessica Ng at (250) 356-1839, or visit www.iafbc.ca/iafi. ■

IAF Welcomes Four New Directors

Four new directors joined IAF's board in 2007.



Debbie Aarts represents the dairy sector. Debbie and her husband John farm 300 acres in the Fraser Valley, milking 250 purebred Holsteins. Debbie has sat on the board of a local private school, spent

six years on the board of the BC Dairy Foundation and represented BC on the National Promotion Board of Dairy Farmers of Canada. More recently, she served on the BC Milk Marketing Board.



Chris Byra represents the farm supply sector. Chris holds an MBA from the University of Guelph and a DVM from the Western College of Veterinary Medicine. He currently works

with Greenbelt Swine Veterinary Services and with Dairy SMART Management providing animal health services and dairy management consultation. Chris has worked for the British Columbia Veterinary Medical Association and the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association in a variety of roles over the course of his career.



Gay Hahn, a dairy farmer, represents the post farm gate sector. Gay is president and CEO of Avalon Dairy, a highly successful organic milk product producer in Vancouver. She is a founding

member and board chair of the BC Food Processors Association, as well as chair of the board for the BC

Dairy Foundation and an active member of the BC Organic Association. Now chair of a National Seafood Sector Council initiative, Gay works to define the human resources and training needs of the agri-food processing sector.



Peter Levelton represents the greenhouse, floriculture & nursery sectors. Since 1987, Peter and his wife Jane have owned and operated East Richmond Nurseries. Currently the Environment

Chair for the Canadian Nursery Landscape Association, Peter spent six years as President and Vice President of the BC Landscape and Nursery Association. He has served on the executives of the Kinsmen Club of Richmond and the Richmond Youth Soccer organization.

"We have selected a complement of directors that meet the current needs of the Foundation and can provide strong input, expertise and representation to the board," said Bruce Bakker, chair of the industry members' group that makes appointments to the IAF board.

While welcoming these new members, the IAF and its partners wish the best for its departing directors: William Cheuk, Deborah Henderson, Cornelis Hertgers and Bob McCoubrey. ■

IAF DIRECTORS

H.A. (Bert) Miles, CMA
Chair, Coquitlam

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Chilliwack

Garnet Berge
Dawson Creek

John Berry
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Application Deadlines

Applicants are encouraged to submit proposals in advance of the following deadlines:
August 31, 2007 ■ November 2, 2007

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