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GROWING TOMORROW

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The latest from the Investment Agriculture Foundation of British Columbia

Agriculture: Important to BC Communities

Many communities around British Columbia depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Agriculture in our communities encompasses the full spectrum of agribusiness, from small lot to large-scale commercial operations. Food and beverage processors and other businesses, such as agri-tourism operators, food retailers and restaurants, add to the rich diversity of our community food systems.

Agriculture contributes significantly to our province's economy: almost 300,000 British Columbians work on farms and ranches, and in orchards, greenhouses, nurseries and other services. Farmers' markets alone generate \$118.5 million annually. Agriculture also helps maintain the environmental and social vitality of our rural communities. Farmers, as stewards of the land, are in a unique position to preserve environmental integrity, habitat and green space.

Small-scale agriculture encompasses the majority of farmers. In 2007, according to Statistics Canada, farms with an average income of less than \$100,000 encompassed almost 64 per cent of all farms in BC. Though considered small scale, the value of community farming is anything but minor, playing an especially important role in sustaining the rural infrastructure that supports agricultural activity. "Without the small guys, the whole agricultural infrastructure would disappear," says Gerry McClintock, the past community agriculture representative on IAF's board and owner of McClintock's Farm in Courtenay.



Both McClintock and Jim Tingle, the current community agriculture representative, see small-scale agriculture as vital to the sustainability of the industry as a whole. For Tingle, owner and operator of Glenbirnam Farm in Prince George, it's about the next generation of farmers. "How do we encourage potential new farmers to get into agriculture? Community agriculture is where young farmers and families can start," he says.

All types of agriculture, however, are faced with emerging issues and challenges, as well as exciting opportunities. With the multi-faceted role that agriculture plays in our communities, getting local government involved is important in addressing issues and seizing opportunities at a community level.

Allan Patton – a director of the Rural Oliver Regional District who formed the Agricultural Advisory Committee for the Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen – strongly advocates involving local government. Patton, who authored the first agricultural area plan to be endorsed by the district, emphasizes that "the most important thing for local governments to consider is the involvement of a diverse group of people in [an] advisory committee, including leaders in the farming community, local councillors and aldermen, the regional district, the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands and the Land Commission."

Within this issue of **GROWING TOMORROW**, you'll discover the ways in which IAF funds have helped local governments and industry organizations alike to address emerging issues and maintain the vitality of BC's rural communities. Read on to find out more.

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The Next Generation of Horticulturalists

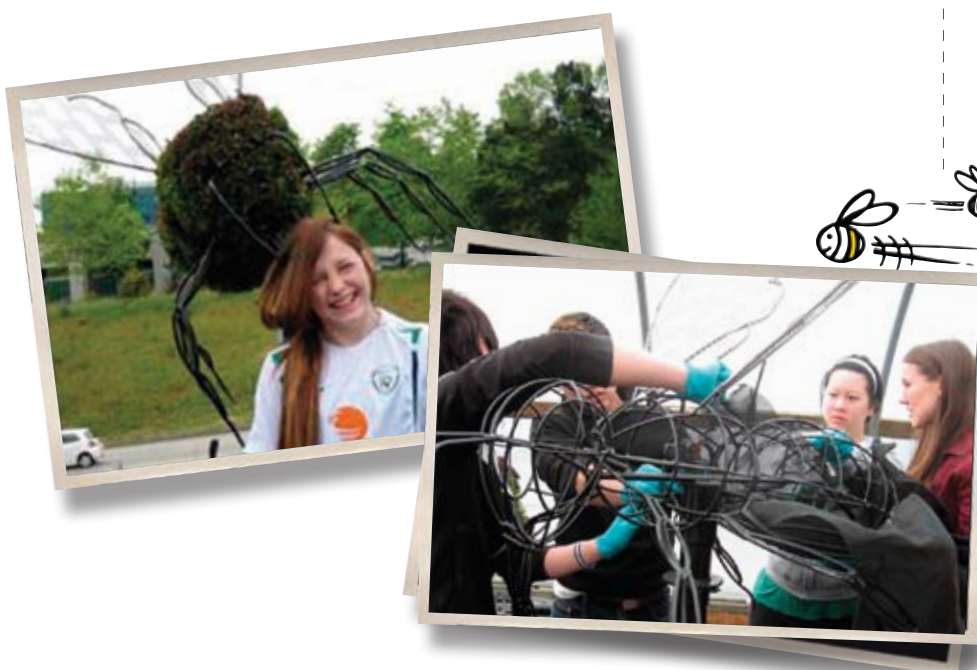
In the spring of 2008, Burnaby Mountain Secondary launched a pilot project designed to build awareness about sustainable food production, while encouraging youth to explore the world of horticulture.

A lack of skilled workers is a major issue facing the horticulture industry. The Bees and Lavender Project, a partnership between Burnaby Mountain, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, the City of Burnaby and HortEducation BC, was intended to feed into the secondary school's apprenticeship program.

The horticulture apprenticeship program offers students in grades 11 and 12 courses in vocation work that feed into post-secondary studies, putting them on their way to a journeyman's ticket even before high school graduation.

With \$10,000 from IAF through the Small Projects Program, participating students learned the fundamentals of landscape design and the activities involved in creating and planting "eco-sculpture" topiary frames. These sculptures were then planted in a bee-friendly lavender garden, accented with native plants and flowers, adjacent to the school.

Aside from the vocational training, the Bees and Lavender Project aimed to encourage the adoption of sustainable practices in the high school curriculum and to educate urban students about food production. "The most important outcome of the project is the awareness," says Joan Parsonson, community projects educator with Burnaby Mountain Secondary.



"These kids were working with plants for the first time ever. All of them are city kids, many of whom have never been to a farm. It was great to see that shift in awareness and a real sense of ownership develop."

Parsonson emphasizes that, ultimately, the eco-sculptures were "a hook for learning and a symbol that schools have begun to integrate sustainable practices."

The students' enthusiasm has not waned, as they continue to create a healthy, green school by growing their own organic produce on campus, mentoring younger students and participating in school and community events, such as Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Agriculture in the City and Burnaby Mountain's Earth Day activities.

Overall, the success of the Bees and Lavender Project has led to an increased understanding of and enthusiasm for food production among the next generation of potential horticulturalists.

Growing Forward Programs Foster Agricultural Innovation

On April 1 Canada and BC announced the signing of the **Growing Forward** bilateral agreement. The Growing Forward national framework is focused on achieving results, reflects input from across the sector, and delivers programs that are simple, more effective and tailored to local needs.

The framework will help build a vibrant agriculture and agri-food sector supported by government programs that are more flexible and that help the sector be proactive at managing risk, and contributes to the environment and the health and wellness of Canadians.

In addition to cost-shared programs with the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, AAFC recently announced three national suites of programs for federal delivery as part of the framework:

The Growing Canadian Agri-Innovations Program contains four initiatives: Agri-Science Clusters, Developing Innovative Agri-Products, Agri-Foresight, and Promoting Agri-Based Investment Opportunities. It will support getting new agricultural products into the marketplace and improving agricultural processes.

The environment suite focuses on developing and assessing new agri-environmental knowledge, programs and initiatives. This approach will allow farmers to address key environmental challenges including agriculture's impact on water quality and water use, climate change, greenhouse gas emissions and the exploration of new economic opportunities for farmers that encourage additional environmental action.

The Trade and Market Development Program aims for success in global and domestic markets. Through industry-led marketing strategies, a Canada branding strategy, market intelligence and services for exporters and actions to maintain and improve market access, the program will help the sector seize market opportunities and address emerging challenges.

For more details about Growing Forward programs visit www.agr.gc.ca/GrowingForward.



Guiding Land Stewardship

The Natural Capital Project was an undertaking of the Canada West Foundation that examined the relationship between the economy and the environment, recognizing the vital role that natural capital plays in economic prosperity. IAF contributed \$75,000 through the Advancing Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food program to the project's third phase, aimed at developing public policies that facilitate greater land stewardship among public and private land users. This phase focused on two broad areas: agriculture on private land and natural resource extraction on public land. The report "Thinking Outside the Fence" examines international land stewardship policy options specifically for the Canadian agricultural sector. Using seven case studies from the United States, England, Australia and Canada, the report offers several tools for farmers to maintain and build our natural capital assets. The report is available through the **Canada West Foundation's** website at www.cwf.ca.

Pour la version française veuillez consulter www.iafbc.ca/français.htm

Partnering to Seize New Opportunities

The popularity of farmers' markets is at an all-time high and the local food movement is gaining momentum. Agri-tourism opportunities are diversifying farming operations and bringing awareness about the industry to the public.

Despite these prospects for small-scale production, processing, agri-tourism and direct farm marketing, the organizations representing these sectors face significant human resource and financial challenges. There is much overlap between the sectors and, increasingly, strategic partnerships are being seen as a way to utilize limited resources effectively and maximize business opportunities.

This March, \$9,000 from the Agri-Food Futures Fund Agri-Tourism Initiative helped the BC Association of Farmers' Markets (BCAFM), the Small Scale Food Processors Association and the BC AgriTourism Alliance (BCATA) to hold a joint conference in West Kelowna (formerly Westbank) to explore the creation of collaborative partnerships.

"In general, there is a concern about limited resources," says BCATA director Robert Thompson. "With the costs associated with membership in different organizations, many people have to choose one or the other. This conference offered more vitality, creativity and exposure to new ways of doing business by bringing everyone together."

The conference included interactive panel discussions on how individual farm and food businesses can work together to better promote their products. One of the most important outcomes of the conference?



"How excited people were about unifying these organizations and about the sharing occurring," says Thompson.

Tabitha McLoughlin, BCAFm director and conference co-ordinator, notes how the conference helped to raise awareness and find avenues to help people become more reliant on community food systems. "It is really starting to resonate with people how we can build capacity within our communities to create sustainability," says McLoughlin.

Thompson echoes this sentiment, noting that "we are dealing with smaller farms that form the backbone of community agriculture. We can strengthen communities by coming together."

The success of this conference has generated interest from other organizations in getting involved with future events. This is very promising because, as McLoughlin notes, "You can do more in greater numbers. Working in silos doesn't make sense because everything in this industry is connected."



Public Supports BC Farmers & Food Processors

One of IAF's corporate priorities is to assist industry in increasing public awareness and support for agriculture. In the fall of 2008, IAF engaged Ipsos Reid to conduct a poll measuring the BC public's opinions on the provincial agriculture and agri-food industries.

The purpose of the poll was to provide industry with information about the public's awareness of issues affecting the industry and to gauge the level of support for agriculture and agri-food.

The results of the poll were extremely positive. Among the study's specific findings:

- More than nine in 10 British Columbians (93 per cent) believe agriculture is an important contributor to the provincial economy.
- 96 per cent of British Columbians trust farmers to act in the best interests of consumers.
- Nine in ten British Columbians (91 per cent) believe it is important that BC produce enough food so that we don't have to depend on imports from other places.
- Almost nine in 10 British Columbians (88 per cent) like to go out to farms and farmers' markets where they can buy their food directly from the farmer.

What do these results mean for industry? The impact of the agriculture industry on the BC economy is significant, creating jobs and generating revenue in excess of \$2.2 billion. Interestingly, though, three-quarters of British Columbians rate themselves as not knowing much about the industry. This lack of awareness, coupled with a high level of trust and confidence, indicates a great opportunity to educate the public about agriculture.

Although public awareness projects are no longer eligible for funding through the programs IAF delivers, chair Stuart Wilson stresses the important role that the entire industry can play in continually educating the public. "The more British Columbians know about agricultural producers and processors and their related organizations, the more informed choices they can make about the food they put on their tables," says Wilson.

Moreover, survey results indicate that there is an appetite for local food across the province. This appetite signals an opportunity to create deeper linkages between consumers and producers, further strengthening the economies of agricultural communities.

The full survey results can be found online at www.iafbc.ca.

UPCOMING APPLICATION DEADLINES

OCTOBER 2, 2009
& JANUARY 8, 2010

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A Plan for Farmers, by Farmers

In the spring of 2009, rural Oliver completed its first agricultural area plan. With \$35,000 funding from IAF, the Agricultural Advisory Committee of the Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen developed a comprehensive plan to strengthen the long-term viability of Oliver's agricultural industry.



Agriculture plays a significant role in the well-being of the community. "Agriculture commands the highest priority as an economic driver," says Allan Patton, district director and member of the advisory committee.

"It is the principle job creator and economic activity for the community. Agriculture is also the main attraction for tourists, with wine tourism and agri-tourism facilities including farm inns and restaurants."

While a primary source of the community's livelihood, agriculture is not without its challenges in Oliver. Competition for land is a concern, especially the challenges that arise when non-farming residents live on agricultural land. The plan identifies gaps in the Official Community Plan and zoning bylaws that could be harmful to agricultural activity and offers recommendations to address them. The environment is also an important consideration, given the high concentration of endangered species in the area.

Implementation of the plan is now underway, but the work to turn a plan into a concrete set of bylaws is likely to take a couple years, says Patton.

The Rural Oliver agricultural area plan was supported through IAF's Local Government Agriculture Area Planning Program, with funds from the federal Advancing Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food program. The program offers up to \$45,000 of cost-shared funding for agricultural planning in municipalities and regional districts.

Patton notes that there is significant interest in developing plans in other areas of the Okanagan-Similkameen Regional District, using the Oliver plan as a template. It is his hope that eventually the entire region will have a comprehensive plan in place.

Patton adds that the eagerness of other areas to develop plans indicates that "IAF's money is very well spent."

Contact us or visit our website
www.iafbc.ca/ag-plans

to learn more about how your community could benefit from an agricultural area plan.

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The Future of Farmlands

The high cost of land is a significant concern for the continuation of a healthy agricultural industry in the Capital Regional District. Life Cycles Project Society—a non-profit organization dedicated to initiating action around food, health, and urban sustainability in Greater Victoria—organized a collaborative discussion to address farmland accessibility in the CRD. The goal was to identify economically viable options for new and existing farmers in the CRD to access land for agricultural production. A conference in April 2008 drew 30 participants from government, industry and community groups to examine potential solutions. The report resulting from the conference is now available online at <http://lifecyclesproject.ca/conferences/focusonfarmlands>. Funding: \$15,500 through the Agri-Food Futures Funds Islands Agri-Food Initiative.

Cowichan Harvest Celebration

Building relationships that connect people with those who grow their food can help strengthen community. The Cowichan Agricultural Society hosted a harvest celebration and farm market in late September 2008 to showcase local agri-food products and the farmers who grow and produce them. Funding from IAF also enabled the creation of storyboard displays for use at next year's harvest celebration and other community events throughout the year. Funding: \$4,300 through the Agri-Food Futures Funds Islands Agri-Food Initiative.

First Nations Community Gardens

Food security is an important issue for First Nations communities. Through the Aboriginal Agriculture Initiative, many communities around BC have received funding to establish community demonstration gardens. These gardens provide opportunities for skills training and development, as well as providing healthy, delicious food to the community. The Ucwalmicw Centre Society, located in Lillooet, established a large organic vegetable garden to be maintained by the community, aiming to rekindle agricultural production and teach youth how to grow their own food using organic methods. As part of a sustainability plan for the whole community, the garden will help the community to build the necessary infrastructure for food production and achieve self-sufficiency. On the Capilano Reserve in North Vancouver, the Ustlahn Social Society established a garden that helped feed the community and created a social space in which to support agricultural awareness. The community hoped to engage youth and women in particular by encouraging their contribution to the maintenance of the garden. Funding: \$6,451 (Ucwalmicw Centre Society) and \$13,500 (Ustlahn Social Society) through the Agri-Food Futures Funds Aboriginal Agriculture Initiative.

Weeding Out Invasive Plants

Invasive plants pose a problem for the agriculture industry, both economically and environmentally. Species such as knapweed infest rangelands and reduce forage quality. Many other species out-compete crops in cultivated fields, causing estimated crop losses exceeding \$50 million annually in BC alone. In the south Okanagan, the regional weed committee developed a co-ordinated management strategy for puncturevine (*Tribulus terrestris*), a species that establishes itself between rows of ground crops such as tomatoes, melons and strawberries and competes with newly-planted grapevines. A three-pronged approach of education, outreach and action included the development of workshops, informational posters and demonstration plots to communicate best management practices. Funding: \$10,000 through the federal-provincial Safety Net Companion Program.