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## *ADAPT Council Industry Newsletter*

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### **Workshop Explores Concept of Value Chain**

Value chains are one way being suggested to gain producers a greater share of the food dollar. The concept behind value chains is relatively simple— it calls for a more formal commercial relationship between farmers and retailers. It allows producers to obtain premiums for their product when it has attributes that are valued by the consumer such as quality, convenience, health benefits and animal welfare issues. Quite simply, it is a recognition that not all agricultural products that end up on store shelves are created equally and consumers value certain practices in food production and are willing to pay extra to get them.

With financial help from the PEI ADAPT Council (which administers the Canadian Adaptation and Rural Development Fund in the province for Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada), the Farm Income Improvement Committee held a value-chains workshop recent at the Stanley Bridge Resort. The committee, chaired by former Prince Edward Island Federation of Agriculture president Robert MacDonald, was formed as a follow-up to a symposium of sustainable agriculture held just over a year ago. It includes representatives from all of the major farm organizations and commodity groups.

"There was plenty of good input and ideas at the workshop," said MacDonald. "However, this is not something that can be done overnight— there is no magic solution and it is going to take some time."

MacDonald concedes the value chains idea will probably gain its first early successes with new products. He said the current system works quite well for suppliers and retailers and it will be a major task to convince them to change. "We have to start with new products and hopefully we will achieve some success in that area and we can move further," he said.

However, the facilitator of the workshop said there is some incentive for stores like Sobey's and

Loblaws to look at the idea. Paul McInnes, an agricultural economist who specializes in value-chain development, said there is a storm cloud on the horizon for those companies— big box stores like Wal-Mart who are moving into the grocery business.

McInnes said top quality locally produced products can give the traditional grocery stores an edge as they take on the world's largest retail organization.

MacDonald said the workshop was the first major project undertaken by the committee. He said the group will continue to meet regularly and now hopes to develop suggestions in such areas as marketing and distribution. The committee operates out of the Federation of Agriculture office. Ronda Bellefontaine has been seconded to the committee from the Department of Agriculture as a resource/staff person.

### **New Treatment for Mastitis**

For dairy farmers, mastitis is public enemy number one. Although the infection has several forms, the end result is usually the same. An infected animal will be out of production for several days. That's because the standard way to treat an udder infection is through antibiotics, so the cow's milk has to be dumped until the drug leaves its system- that usually takes between 72 and 96 hours.

However, with funding help from the PEI ADAPT Council (which administers the Canadian Adaptation and Rural Development Fund in the province for Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada), Bloyce Thompson is exploring another approach. His Frenchfort farm, which has been in the Thompson family for several generations, has won more than its share of provincial, regional and national awards for its herd genetics.

He said his farm has always been willing to try new and innovative methods that can increase production.

The dairycell is a hand-held box with electrodes that are hooked up to the cows' udders. An electrical current is passed through the machine to massage the swelling and help them relax and start the healing process. He said the animal is typically treated for eight minutes, with the treatment applied twice if the case is severe.

“The success rate is about 60 percent, which is about the same as antibiotics,” he said. However, there is a big difference. Since there are no drugs involved, there is no need to dump any milk. That means there is no lost production and, “although the capital cost is quite high, it does pay for itself when you consider the production that would be lost.”

Thompson has been using the machine for about a year, and he estimates the machine is used at least once a week between the two farms in the trial. He said the machine is highly portable and the only drawback he has noticed is the requirement to physically stand next to the animal and hold the machine. “Eight minutes may not sound like much, but if you have other things to do it can slow you down,” he said.

The Thompson farm is the first in the province to use the machine, and he said there has been some interest from other producers. Due to the high price tag, he said the most cost effective approach is to have several producers who live in a close geographic proximity to buy it jointly. “Since you are only using it for eight to 16 minutes at a time, it lends itself well to being shared,” said Thompson.

### **Researching the Small Potato**

When it comes to potatoes, sometimes smaller is better. There has been a growing consumer demand across North America for smaller spuds. Colleen Walton said it is easy to see why - they take less time to cook and there is visual appeal in a more petite potato.

Walton is the technical director for FoodTrust of Prince Edward Island. With financial help from the PEI ADAPT Council, (which administers the Canadian Adaptation and Rural Development Fund in the province for Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada) FoodTrust is conducting a two-year research project on what small varieties grow best in the Island climate. FoodTrust is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to rebuilding the link between producers and consumers. The organization works with Prince Edward Island growers and harvesters to establish sustainable growing standards that respond to the consumer need for a safe, high quality food source. As well, the organization is looking at ways to adapt conventional harvesting equipment to bring a small sized crop off the field.

“Commercial harvesters really aren't set up to handle potatoes under two inches in diameter,” she explained. Since the growing season in Prince Edward Island is relatively short compared to some other potato growing areas, Walton said the trial will focus on picking varieties that will allow the industry to supply small potatoes to the marketplace on a year round basis.

She said FoodTrust has been conducting research on the success of small potatoes grown throughout the world. She said there is a company in Alberta that specializes in small potatoes and they have also been grown on a commercial scale in the United Kingdom.

“One thing you learn very quickly in the potato business is that there is no such thing as a typical year,” she said. “As well, we have to take into account the Island climate and soil - just because a variety flourishes in another part of the world doesn't mean it will grow well here.”

FoodTrust and its partner growers have already enjoyed considerable success in introducing new and innovative products to the consumer marketplace locally, nationally and internationally. Summerside Farms Pork, sold exclusively through Co-op Atlantic stores, has been a major seller. Fresh Obsession potatoes were introduced at A&P stores in Ontario in 2003. Last Christmas season, a new yellow flesh “fingerling” potato was added to the Fresh Obsessions line for a limited time.

More recently it introduced blue potatoes to the market. On the plate for the 2005 and 2006 growing seasons are the yellow flesh fingerling potato, a new red skin/yellow flesh variety, a blue skin/white flesh with blue streaks variety, and a yellow flesh variety with pink eyes.

## **A Shrinking Crop of Young Farmers**

By Carolyn Jung

Young farmer? Nationwide -- and statewide -- that's an oxymoron if there ever was one.

At all of 32 years of age, Watsonville strawberry farmer Rob Rodriguez stands out. Most other farmers he knows are of his father's generation, not his.

According to census data, the number of farmers under 35 fell 44 percent in California and 18 percent nationwide from 1997 to 2002. As a result, in 2002, only 5.8 percent of all farmers nationwide could count themselves in Rodriguez's age group.

The high price of land, the scarcity of farmland near urban centers, as well as more lucrative job opportunities in other less physically taxing industries, have increasingly made farming a hard sell to a new generation.

Just consider: The average age of a principal farm operator in the United States in 2002 was 55.3, according to the U.S. Census of Agriculture; in California, the average age was slightly

higher at

56.8. And those averages have been steadily climbing since 1978.

“Farmers look at all the barriers -- economic, trade, environment, irrigation, the market,” said Michael Marks, a Sacramento produce specialist who has been in the fruit and vegetable industry for more than 25 years. “When you look at all that, why in the world would a college-educated son of a third-generation farmer want to take over the family farm except to take over the land to sell it to a developer?”

They think, ‘I can grow one crop of houses and retire. Or I can continue fighting these uphill barriers and try to survive.’ ”

But some do. Look around closely -- very closely -- and you'll spot the dedicated few: 20-something and 30-something farmers plying their fruits and vegetables at Bay Area farmers markets, or getting their hands dirty in their lush fields in Santa Cruz and Monterey counties. Some are Latino and Southeast Asian immigrant farmworkers who have risen to new independence in running their own farms. And some are U.S.-born and college-educated, drawn to this graying industry to rally the causes of organics and sustainability.

Read the rest of this article at:

[www.mercurynews.com/mld/mercurynews/living/food/12120501.htm](http://www.mercurynews.com/mld/mercurynews/living/food/12120501.htm).

## **Upcoming Events**

August 24, 2005

Dr. John Ikerd; “Sustainable Capitalism” UPEI, 3:00 p.m. Irving Science Bldg.

Dr. Ikerd spent the first half of his thirty-year academic career as a traditional free-market, neoclassical economist. He served on the faculties of four major state universities during his career: North Carolina State University, Oklahoma State University, the University of Georgia, and the University of Missouri. Growing concerns for the lack of ecological, social, and economic sustainability of American agriculture during the 1980s led to broader concerns for the lack of sustainability for American society in general. As an economist, Dr. Ikerd eventually came to understand that growing threats to ecological and social sustainability are rooted in the neoclassical paradigm of economic development, which is inherently extractive and exploitative, and thus, is not sustainable. Dr. Ikerd spent the last half of his academic career and much of his time since retirement developing and testing the concepts and principles of an alternative development paradigm, the economics of sustainability,

September 16, 2005, Advanced Leadership Development; Creating High Performance Teams Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. Facilitated by the Banff Academy for Business.

[www.banffacademy.com](http://www.banffacademy.com)

September 16-18, 2005 BioFach America: Organic Products Expo. IFOAM sponsored event in Washington, D.C., [www.ifoam.org](http://www.ifoam.org)

September 17, 2005 Nappan Project Fall Fair: Celebrating sustainable living, a bountiful harvest and the beauty of nature. Email [nappanproject@ns.sympatico.ca](mailto:nappanproject@ns.sympatico.ca) for details.

September 20-27, 2005 15th IFOAM Organic World Congress, “Shaping Sustainable Systems”, Adelaide Australia. For more information see [www.ifoam.org](http://www.ifoam.org)

September 25, 2005 – Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick Open Farm Day

September 30-October 2, 2005 - 3rd National Food Security Assembly, Waterloo ON. Themes are Global Food Security, Healthy and Safe Foods, Sustainable Food Systems, and Hunger and Emergency Food.

October 16 - 22 independent Organic Inspectors Training, Falls Brook IOIA Inspector Training. Knowlesville, New Brunswick. For more information, contact Andrea Berry, Organic Agriculture Program Coordinator at (506) 375-4310 or [andrea@fallsbrookcentre.ca](mailto:andrea@fallsbrookcentre.ca). For updates please visit the FBC website [www.fallsbrookcentre.ca](http://www.fallsbrookcentre.ca) or IOIA website [www.ioia.net](http://www.ioia.net).

October 21-23, 2005 Women in Sustainable Agriculture Conference: A Celebration of Hope and Opportunity Burlington, VT. For more information see [www.uvm.edu/wagn/womeninag.html](http://www.uvm.edu/wagn/womeninag.html)

October 27-28, 2005 Executive Director/Ex-Officio Officer meeting at the “Issues and Opportunities” meeting that the Saskatchewan Council is organizing for in Saskatoon, SK.

November 6-9, 2005 "Identifying Strategies to Support Sustainable Agriculture in Canada" Agricultural Institute of Canada (AIC) Annual Conference Quebec City, QC. For more information, see [www.organicagcentre.ca/Events/aic\\_quebec\\_nov05.html](http://www.organicagcentre.ca/Events/aic_quebec_nov05.html)

January 26-29, 2006 25th Annual Guelph Organic Conference “Living Organic–The next 25 years” For more information see [www.guelphorganicconf.ca](http://www.guelphorganicconf.ca)

February 28-March 2, 2006 First International Organic Apple and Pear Symposium, Wolfville, NS. More information available at: <http://www.oacc.info/AppleSymposium/home.html>

March 2-4, 2006 Sixth Annual ACORN Organic Conference and Tradeshow “Organic Prosperity–Rooted in Community”, Wolfville, NS. More information coming soon at [www.acornorganic.org/pages/annualconference.html](http://www.acornorganic.org/pages/annualconference.html)