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Pinpointing The Right Cut

Food safety is becoming a growing concern with today's consumer.

To ensure that food is top quality "from gate to plate", both producers and processors needed to be able to trace back the source of any problems that might occur. With funding help from the P.E.I. ADAPT Council, Nova Scotia Agri-Futures and the New Brunswick Agriculture Council (each of which administers the Canadian Adaptation and Rural Development Fund in their respective province for Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada), the new Atlantic Beef Products Inc. plant in Albany has a traceability system that is the envy of the industry.

"We are just getting the system install now and it should be up and running in late October or early November," said Kirk McGrath, the plant's general manager. "As with any new technology it will take some time to work any kinks out."

When the system is fully operational, McGrath said they will be able to trace any cut of meat to the exact animal it came from and the time and date it went through the facility. On the processing line, the computer technology tells the worker the next cut that will be taken off the animal on the line.

"It should be relatively easy for our workers to use," he said. "It is really amazing exactly what the system can do— it is something that wouldn't even be thought of even ten years ago."

McGrath said once the technology is fully operational, the plant plans to hold an official opening. They have been processing cattle since December of 2004 and he said they are slowly but surely moving up to the weekly capacity of 500 animals per week.

The plant manager said it has been somewhat of a challenge to install the new equipment while maintaining day-to-day operations. However, he is confident the inconvenience will be worth it in the end.

Producers have the largest share in the plant (the P.E.I. government is a minority shareholder) that processes product exclusively for the Atlantic Tender Beef line sold in Co-op Atlantic stores. While the plant handles cattle from all three Maritime provinces, approximately 80 per cent of the animals slaughtered come from P.E.I. The facility has a full time workforce of over 60 and an annual payroll of \$2.5 million.

The chair of the plant's board of directors is hoping the technology will give Maritime beef producers an edge in an increasingly competitive marketplace. Dean Baglole said the technology will likely become the standard in the beef processing industry and he sees a real advantage in being in on the ground floor.

Baglole said the key to making the plant a reality was building partnerships not only between beef producers in the three Maritime provinces but with the federal and P.E.I. governments and Co-op Atlantic. He is hoping having a plant within the region will help producers whether any future downturns like the closure of the U.S. border due to the discover of mad cow disease in Alberta.

Future Tech West to Develop a First of its Kind E-farm Portal for Island Farmers

Future Tech West, a rural Information Technology (IT) centre focused on agribusiness, is developing a new portal-based web environment to assist the Island's agricultural community.

This E-Farm Portal will give farmers and specialists access to a variety of technology-based products and services. It will include opportunities for farmers to collaborate and share best practices online, web conferencing, e-learning and content management, a grassroots test-bed for new products, a farmers' storefront for buying and selling goods and services, tools to improve farm productivity and a comprehensive and interactive section on farm and food safety.

The Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) is providing \$230,000 to the project through the Innovative Communities Fund (ICF), with an additional \$20,000 from the PEI Adapt Council, a not-for-profit organization with funds from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada dedicated to increasing the long-term growth, self-reliance, employment and competitiveness for PEI's agri-food sector and rural communities. The Province of Prince Edward Island, through Technology PEI, is providing \$50,000. Future Tech West will cover the remaining project costs.

The Honourable Joe McGuire, Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) and Eva Rodgeron, MLA for West Point—Bloomfield, on behalf of the Honourable Mike Currie, Minister of Development and Technology, along with Darren Gill, Manager of Future Tech West, were on-site to review the development plan for the new e-service.

“This new E-Farm Portal will position Prince Edward Island as a research and development test-bed for emerging wireless and web-based services and other farming-related technologies,”

said Minister McGuire. “These are also important economic development tools for the agriculture industry because they will foster collaboration in agribusiness, promote innovative thinking and lead to new product development.”

The new portal will be designed to assist farmers in improving farm productivity, reducing production costs, enhancing product quality, and improving accountability through the management and communication of up-to-date policies, standards and methods. It will also provide financial tools and additional resources for evaluating and planning production costs, pest and disease management and crop rotations.

“With a service like the E-Farm portal in place, farmers will be better equipped to deal with crop monitoring and food safety issues among several other crucial elements related to farming needs,” said MLA Rodgeron. “The challenges of a viable agriculture industry are becoming much more significant. Meeting those challenges demands the implementation of innovative technology services that will enable us to remain competitive.”

The development of the portal, which requires the complex adaptation of hardware and software, is expected to take several months to complete.

“This new service will provide an online environment that will foster creative ideas among farmers, resulting in new and enhanced strategies, methods and solutions,” said Future Tech West’s Darren Gill. “When it’s ready to go, we plan to launch the service to farmers in a hands-on demonstration of its many uses and benefits.”

Agriculture Certificate Program Pilot Project In Schools

Turn the clock back a generation and it was standard practice for rural P.E.I. schools to shut down during the potato harvest.

Despite the fact agriculture remains the province's number one industry, its presence in the classroom is rare. The P.E.I. Agricultural Resources Development Council (an umbrella agency with broad representation throughout the farming community) has been working hard to change that. The council has worked with educators to develop programs that integrate the study of agriculture into classrooms across the province.

One of their major successes has been the agriculture certificate program, which is being run on a pilot basis at Kinkora and Kensington high schools. The council receives funding help for the program from the P.E.I. ADAPT Council, which administers the Canadian Adaptation and Rural Development Program in the province for Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

"Students who are interested apply at the end of Grade Nine," said Shelly Tremere, who is in charge of the program at Kinkora High School.

Brian Gard performs a similar role at Kensington Intermediate-Senior High School. Tremere said agriculture is integrated into the curriculum over the course of their high school life, however she emphasized the students still take courses like math and English just like the rest of the student body. However, through the co-operation of the teaching staff in the two schools, even the work done by students in these courses has an agriculture related theme. The students graduate with a high school diploma specializing in agriculture.

Over the course of the three years, the students must also do 240 hours of agricultural work. She explained that can be in the form of a part-time job or volunteering. To help the students meet

that goals, they are required to do a paid internship before graduation. Tremere said about half the students do have an agricultural background, which others are thinking of agricultural related careers.

As well, throughout the three years students attend a number of agricultural related events (everything from farm visits to organic conferences) and hear a number of special speakers on various agricultural related topics.

"It has been a tremendously successful program so far," Tremere said. 'All of the feedback we have gotten from students has been extremely positive."

The course has obtained a stamp of approval from Nova Scotia Agriculture College in Truro—the region's post-secondary agricultural training institution. Students wanting to go on to the Nova Scotia college receive credit for the work done in the agricultural certificate program.

The Initiative to Develop an Organic Dairy Industry on Pei Moves Ahead:

As the market for organic dairy products continues to grow in Europe and North America, a number of dairy producers in PEI are looking to convert to certified organic production.

Charlottetown's Purity Dairy owner, Tom Cullen, says that the organic initiative, led by Roger Henry, with funds from the PEI ADAPT Council, has completed the first phase of the project by identifying a group of dairy

producers who are interested in organic dairy production. He says there have been several discussions over price premiums and believes that this issue will be settled shortly. The next step he says is to identify the challenges with regard to animal health because organic production restricts a number of conventional herd treatments. Mr Cullen says that producers are looking to work with the Atlantic Veterinarian College to identify and develop homeopathic techniques that will replace conventional veterinarian methods of disease control.

Ideas and Opportunities

WELCOME TO AGRIWEBINAR

The Canadian Farm Business Management Council (CFBMC) is pleased to present its fall and winter series of FREE webinars for farmers. The online seminars cover today's hot topics in agriculture and feature well-known leading edge experts. Accessible via dial-up and high speed, the series offers a unique opportunity for farm managers, agribusinesses and commodity groups to communicate directly with experts they might otherwise never be able to meet. For information of Speakers and dates, go to <http://farmcentre.com/english/agriwebinar/webinars/speakers/speakersindex.htm>

AGRO-FORESTRY ON THE FARM - Exploring Potential Opportunities Conference - December 6 & 7

P.E.I. Soil and Crop is holding a conference on Agro Forestry. It will be held at the Dutch Inn in Cornwall. Agenda will be posted on the Calendar of events www.gov.pe.ca/go/agevents

AGRICULTURE -BIOBASED ECONOMY

Agriculture has great potential to be at the forefront of what is being called the biobased economy. Industrial uses for crops that are used to replace fossil fuels could broaden the market for agricultural products. Some information related to the biobased economy and websites are listed below. Biobased economy: An economy in which most industry, commercial and economic activity depends on renewable biomass and biological processes to supply energy, chemicals, products and services. Bioproducts are to the biobased economy what fossil fuels and petrochemicals are to the current fossil fuel economy that now provides about 80 per cent of the worlds energy needs.

* Primer on Bioproducts Developed by BIOCAP and Pollution Probe goto <http://www.biocap.ca/index.cfm?meds=section&ion=36&category=20>
* Federal Government Overview Capturing Canadas Natural Advantage Together <http://www.bio-productscanada.org/toolkit/toolkit.html>

BIOBASED PRODUCTS AND BIOENERGY VISION AND ROADMAP FOR IOWA

<http://www.ciras.iastate.edu/iof/pdf/IABioVisionRoadmap.pdf>
The Web site of the Center for New Crops & Plant Products, at Purdue University. NewCROP provides windows to new and specialty crop profiles. <http://www.hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/default.html>

ETHNIC FOODS MARKET

The U.S. ethnic foods market is estimated at \$75 billion in annual sales. It is the equivalent of \$1 out of every \$7 being spent on groceries. Food service accounts for 65 percent of the ethnic food sales and supermarkets have the remaining 35 percent of the market. <http://www.agmrc.org/agmrc/markets/Food/ethnicfoodsmarket.htm>

2006 North American Farmers' Direct Marketing Conference to be held in Texas, January 9 -16 is now on-line at <http://www.nafdma.com/>

2005 MARITIME PORK CONFERENCE November 4 & 5. Charlottetown http://www.gov.pe.ca/af/agweb/events_calendar/displaylinks.php3?event_id=1238

LANGUAGE TRANSLATION HELP AVAILABLE

When you encounter a Web page in a foreign language (or find some text in a book or magazine), you can get the text translated using AltaVista's BabelFish at <http://babelfish.altavista.com>