



ADAPT Council Industry Newsletter



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Island Farmers Investigating Diversification Opportunities

In agriculture the only constant is change. The recent downturn in commodity markets has led many producers to explore diversification opportunities. After reading some agricultural magazines, Gary Renkema, a hog farmer in Wheatley River, PEI, came to the conclusion Saskatoon berries and Elderberries might fit the bill.

On behalf of other producers like himself, Renkema applied to the P.E.I. ADAPT Council which administers the Advancing Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food (ACAAF) program, an Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada program designed to help implement innovative projects that will benefit the production and processing sector, bolster the industry's capacity to address current and emerging issues and position the agriculture and agri-food industry to seize new market opportunities.

He received \$2,000 to travel to Saskatchewan, Alberta and Ontario to visit some farms growing both Saskatoon berries and Elderberries

Gary said the two Saskatoon berry producers he visited each grow about 50 acres. One supplies about 30,000 pies a year to local bakeries and they both produce jams and jellies on their farm for sale to the restaurant trade and directly to the consumer.

While Gary is a long way from that level, he has planted a test plot, "it certainly provided plenty of food for thought— there are a lot of possibilities." He noted the Saskatoon berry is high in anti-oxidants and is a big seller in western Canada as a health food and for the pharmaceutical industry.

He added Elderberries also have a high anti-oxidant count, giving them prospects for the pharmaceutical and nutraceutical industries as well. They are also a popular ingredient in wine, and he said there could be a possible market serving regional wineries.

Gary plans to plant his first elderberry crop either this fall or next spring. He said the Island climate is ideally suited to growing both types of berries and "they are pretty low maintenance– they just require pruning."

He said there are some small scale plots of Saskatoon berries in the province but he is hoping to becoming one of the first commercial growers of both varieties. Gary added 'certainly I am pleased with how things are going so far and we are pretty optimistic that someday there could be a significant market opportunity for Island grown Saskatoon berries and Elderberries on store shelves in P.E.I.'

Grain and Straw Could be Important Biofuel Heat Source for PEI

Like every other business, farmers are looking for ways to cut down on their oil bill.

Over the past several months, innovative Island farmers have been investigating options to use a portion of the crops they grow as a feedstock for making biofuels to produce heat, electricity or to run their farm equipment.

While there are many good ideas being discussed, five Island producers have recently formed a group to evaluate the potential of burning their grain and/or straw to heat homes, greenhouses and workshops. While each individual producer will be responsible for purchasing their own furnaces and conversion equipment, they have collectively received \$23,778 from the P.E.I. ADAPT Council to evaluate demonstrate the different technologies.

P.E.I. ADAPT Council administers the Advancing Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food (ACAAF) program, an Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada program designed to help implement innovative projects that will benefit the production and processing sector, bolster the industry's capacity to address current and emerging issues and position the agriculture and agri-food industry to seize new market opportunities.

According to Will Proctor, PEI Agriculture Innovation Officer, who will assist with the evaluations, the five producers involved in the study are using four different technologies to burn straw, corn and/or barley. "Proving that the technology works won't be enough," he said. "It must also be shown to be economically feasible."

He said the first challenge was finding a formula that would allow a comparison not only between the different types of technology but their efficiency compared to oil. To compare apples to apples, the amount of fuel used to measure a specific amount of water going into each boiler will be the yard stick.

"That's really the only way you could do it since water boils at the same temperature no matter what the fuel source," he said.

There are two machine shops in the province that do manufacture boilers designed to burn straw bales. Proctor said he has also discovered a boiler for sale in the Summerside area that was designed to use wood pellets, but can also use barley.

The machines have now been ordered and he expects they should be in place by the end of October. After the producers have a chance to get used to the technology, the group is planning a series demonstration days – probably in December or January.

"These demonstrations are geared to power the farm," Proctor said, "However, if the

technology works it could be easily used in residential settings.” He foresees a time in the future when a home owner could enter into a long term deal with a farmer to supply the fuel source to heat homes, office and commercial buildings across the Island.

Maritime Producers Working to Keep Pace with Organic Food Trends

Organics is the fastest growing segment of the agricultural industry. To help those who might want to either expand their operation or make the transition from conventional production, the Atlantic Canada Organic Regional Network (ACORN) is offering a series of workshops in all three Maritime provinces. The P.E.I. ADAPT Council (which administers the Advancing Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food program for Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada) is contributing \$5,970 towards the portion of project costs on Prince Edward Island.

ACAAF is a national funding program designed to help implement innovative projects that will benefit the production and processing sector, bolster the industry’s capacity to address current and emerging issues and position the agriculture and agri-food industry to seize new market opportunities.

"We have been receiving a fair amount of interest in learning more about organics," said Matthew Holmes, the acting executive director of ACORN.

“For example,” he said, “There is interest in all three Maritime Provinces about establishing the regional organic dairy.” Holmes explained that organic milk products are now coming from Ontario and with growing demand the time is ripe for a local alternative.

Holmes said ACORN will offer a series of three one day seminars throughout the fall. Each session will be offered in Charlottetown, Fredericton and Truro to offer producers in each province a chance to attend.

The first Island session will take place October 23 and will concentrate on making the transition to organic agriculture. Holmes said the session will cover the principles of organics, the growing market and how to become certified.

The second session November 7 will deal with soil health and fertility with tips on how to create a living soil to feed your crops using concepts such as rotations, compost, manures, and soil amendments.

The final session December 12th will cover management of weeds and insects plus state-of-the-art tools, technologies, and resources to produce food and maintain a healthy ecosystem.

The registration fee is \$20 per session for ACORN members and \$30 for non members. There is a special rate of \$45 that covers membership and one workshop. Pre-registration is required. For more information or to register, please call ACORN at 1-866-322-2676, email admin@acornorganic.org or visit our website at www.acornorganic.org

Organic Milk in New Brunswick

The Times and Transcript, June 30, 2006 & Rural Delivery, April 2006 (full article at www.countrymagazines.com/gotorganicmilk.html)

It's believed that about 100,000 litres of organic milk was sold across the Maritimes last year and

50,000 litres of that was sold in New Brunswick—and two New Brunswick companies want a piece of the action. It's still early but the new organic milk line seems to be taking off for the

Northumberland Dairy Co-op Ltd.

The dairy jumped onto this product to establish themselves as a provider for the Maritimes. They have been buying the product from certified organic dairy farmers in Quebec and selling it under the Northumberland name for the past two months.

Saputo Foods Ltd., which now owns the former Baxter Foods dairy in Saint John, also has plans to import organic dairy products produced and processed in Quebec.

Organic Food Radio Broadcasts on CBC

On Wednesdays, September 27, and October 4 and 11, a radio program on organic food will be repeated on "Ideas" on CBC Radio One at 9:05 pm:

Organic food has jumped from the margins to the mainstream and is now the fastest growing food category on supermarket shelves. What started as a social movement has become an industry with companies like General Mills, ConAgra and Kraft as major players. For some, this represents a victory for organics. Others worry that success will compromise the ideals of the movement. Jill Eisen looks at the past, present and future of organics.

Podcasts of the three programs are also available for the next few weeks. You can download the programs at www.cbc.ca/ideas/podcast.html.

Marketing with More Creativity than Cash Workshops

SEPTEMBER 27th Old Orchard Inn, Wolfville

SEPTEMBER 28th Claymore Inn, Antigonish

Today's family farmers have to know much more than how to achieve success in planting and cultivating crops. With the problems they face in commodity pricing and even with co-op sales, the successful farmers realize they must market their products directly to consumers. Whether you're a novice or advanced farm marketer, it is critical to develop a plan to grow your customer base and increase sales. Jane Eckert helped increase revenues at her family farm by more than 300%, and developed a special plan designed just for farmers, The Eckert Farm Marketing Plan.

Traditionally, family farmers have a limited marketing budget and use most of it for buying advertising space, which is not very effective. Jane's innovative "Farm Marketing Pie" divides strategies into slices that use more creativity than dollars for a high return in revenue. Learn Jane's winning approach to brochures, websites, e-newsletters, promotions, media relations, and focus on the customer, all designed to make sales increase. You'll leave the workshop knowing how to set the right marketing priorities and immediate steps to take for positive results.

Workshop Leader: Jane Eckert

It is no wonder that Jane Eckert, a farmer's daughter and former corporate marketing executive, has become a recognized expert on agritourism, a growing travel trend in America. She created one of the most successful tourism farms in North America and now helps members of the travel and agriculture industries tap into the agritourism market. Jane has spoken and conducted workshops in 27 U.S. states and four Canadian provinces, published several books on farm marketing, and provided private consulting to numerous farms.

Jane has been featured in U.S.A. Today, Time and interviewed for hundreds of newspapers, magazines and radio shows throughout the country. Jane's articles appear monthly in Canada in The Grower and in the US in Fruit Growers News, and the Vegetable Growers News. In her speeches and workshops, she has helped thousands of tourism and ag professionals to see the financial benefits of promoting the niche product of agritourism.

For more information contact AgraPoint: Ag Info Centre 1-866-606-4636 info@agrapoint.ca

Renewable Energy Project Finance:

Capitalizing on Policy Frameworks & Innovative Financing Methods
November 16 - 17, 2006 · New York, NY

Project developers and investors come together to identify the major opportunities and issues in project finance for renewable energy.

Capitalize on policy frameworks and innovative financing methods

Learn more: <http://www.iqpc.com/cgi-bin/templates/genevent.html?event=11218>

Consumer Focused Types of Agriculture May Offer Additional Options for Diversification

By Katherine L. Adam, NCAT Agriculture Specialist
September 2004; ATTRA Publication #IP109

Abstract:

Diversification into ... such opportunities as agricultural or educational tours, u-pick operations, farm stores, pumpkin patches, agricultural festivals, and farm stands is not a substitute for a pro family farm agenda ... [However,] one of my fears is that if farmers and ranchers are too tardy in their response to this emerging opportunity, theme park operators will develop simulated farms and operate them as agri-tourism attractions.

Joel Salatin, innovator in small-scale agriculture and proprietor of Polyface Farm in Virginia, has published a handbook for beginning farmers.(1) In it he offers a perspective on an important dimension of the future of American farming—education and entertainment. At least one state—Vermont—has redirected the bulk of its support for agriculture into rural tourism. Salatin and other agricultural writers believe that this is what the public wants and will pay for.

While the popularity of specific enterprises—such as pumpkin patches or U-Pick orchards—may ebb and flow, the public's desire for a "farm experience" remains. Small diversified farms are ideally suited to agri-entertainment. Unlike the mega-hog facility or a corn/soybean operation producing bulk commodities, the small farm can recreate an earlier, simpler, human-scale vision of farming. The chief qualification for the rural landowner who expects to make a living from the land through agri-tourism is the desire and the ability to cater to tourists and meet their expectations of a farm visit.

Tourism is an important industry in many states. For example, it is the second largest industry in New York and the largest in Arkansas. Most writers agree on three main components of rural tourism: small businesses, agricultural events, and regional promotion. Some state agri-tourism promoters lump direct-marketing methods such as CSAs, as well as farm sales of such specialty crops as flowers, garlic, and Asian pears, within the general category of agri-tourism. State-led agri-tourism initiatives work to expand existing businesses, create new festivals and farm markets, and tie this all together regionally to attract visitors. Federal, state, and corporate grants funded the 500-mile Seaway Trail along Lake Ontario in New York, providing advertising and promotion of its agri-tourism enterprises along the way.

Advice for New Ag Entrepreneurs

*Starting any new enterprise can be risky. Before investing money, time, and energy in an unconventional agricultural business, new entrepreneurs should complete personal, market, project feasibility, and financial evaluations. Workbooks are available to help work through the questions that arise in enterprise planning. Technical and managerial assistance in these evaluations is available from a wide variety of sources. These include county Extension educators, local and regional organizations committed to rural economic development, small business development centers, state departments of agriculture, economic development agencies, banks, tourism agencies, state universities, and local community colleges. For a brief agri-tourism development checklist, see Appendix A. A business plan can then be developed (basically a spreadsheet) to evaluate the enterprise financially. For guidelines, see the 2004 ATTRA publication *Agricultural Business Planning Templates and Resources*.*

There are three agri-tourism basics: Have something for visitors to see, something for them to do, and something for them to buy. How well you relate the various components (through a theme or otherwise) will determine how successful your entertainment enterprise will be. Things to see and do are often offered free, but there is still a lot of money to be made selling to visitors. Research shows that tourists buy mainly food, beverages, and souvenirs.

The complete, printable, PDF version of this document is available at:

<http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/PDF/entertn.pdf>

16 pages — 834 kb

Leadership Files #9

In today's environment agricultural leaders need to be sources of credible information. Their knowledge is urgently required by policy makers and citizens to develop sustainable policies and practices.

To effectively develop a consensus among their peers, build alliances, and move the industry ahead in the 21st century, leaders must continually hone their communications skills and management styles.

This section of the newsletter addresses the need for developing effective communications skills and management styles. It offers a suite of ideas and techniques to assist in developing skills and values that today's emerging leaders need. Each newsletter will address a new situation/issue which calls upon specific leadership qualities.

Your feedback, submissions and/or suggestions are gratefully appreciated.

9. Decision Making

You don't have to see the whole staircase to take the first step.

-Martin Luther King, Jr

Involving those who are affected by decisions to be involved in the decision making process shows that their opinions are valued and their contributions are appreciated.

If only a few people are affected by a decision, work toward consensus.

Present all options, evaluate pros and cons and prioritize choices.

Consensus may not be practical with a large group if the decision must be made quickly. In which case rely upon those with expertise and those most effected.

ADAPT Council Industry Newsletters are archived at:

<http://www.gov.pe.ca/af/agweb/index.php3?number=69584&lang=E>