



PEI ADAPT Council Agri-Newsletter



Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
Agriculture et Agroalimentaire Canada

Vol. VII; No. 4

Canada

April 14, 2008

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SUSTAINING THE RURAL ECONOMY

Finding reasonable solutions to sustain our Island's agricultural-based economy was the theme of the PEI ADAPT Council's AGM / Conference; March 27, 2008.

The common message from a host of experienced presenters from across the country was that:

“There is a future for agriculture outside of the commodity markets if one is ready to adapt and take advantage of emerging opportunities.”

There are numerous opportunities. These range from engaging consumers to support local foods, to tapping into the high-end food export market, to capturing a portion of the Island's energy consumption (estimated to be over \$350 million for heating), to consumer driven culinary and agri-tourism, as well as on-farm processing and direct marketing.

Rupert Downing, Executive Director, Canadian Community Economic Development Network (CCEDNet), gave examples from around the world of innovative agriculture plans that are revitalizing rural economies. CCEDNet's plan for Canada titled, 'Growing Hope,' and is being endorsed by over 650 member organizations. They seek to strengthen rural communities and create solutions to local needs by focusing on the development of a nation-wide local food system. Growing Hope is about providing incentives for farms through fair trade, environmental sustainability, food security and cultural diversification.

Judy Bertling provided an Island example of ‘Growing Hope.’ Her small scale, mixed farming operation, Pioneer Farm, was developed to serve the increasing number of urban dwellers who are concerned about where our food comes from and who wish to visit and experience a small scale farming operation. Judy Bertling sells more than farm produce. She offers hope, dreams and an experience.

David Mackay carried on with this theme by discussing the growing market opportunities in culinary tourism. MacKay, recently returned from The International Culinary Tourism Conference where he learned how culinary tourism serves the need of the modern traveler by helping define a region’s unique attributes. He said that PEI has all the ingredients necessary to diversify the tourism industry with vibrant and unique culinary experiences.

The subject of value chain operations, wherein farmers organize their production to fit the market needs of consumers was addressed by Barry Balsom, of Arlington Orchards in Tyne Valley, PEI. He said that he learned more about marketing from his customers than any marketing textbook. Balsom claims to be coming off his best year ever. The reason, he is responding to his customers desire for an experience when they come to his farm and by growing unique apple varieties for specialized markets rather than commodity markets.

Raymond Loo, a Breadalbane farmer, reported that his marketing philosophy is ‘Local first and global to supply those who cannot grow their own.’ He has been successful in creating value chain relationships with buyers in Japan (see: www.annespeifarm.com).

He is now creating similar markets for PEI products in Dubai, UAE. He says that he travels to countries with the intention of finding out what they wish to buy rather than looking to sell a particular product. His efforts have helped grow the Island’s organic sector from a small scale to a rapidly expanding international force. “Many urban areas cannot grow their own,” he explained. Our island image makes us attractive. “As a result, he says, Our niche markets are huge.”

Cathleen Kneen, a food policy analyst based in Ottawa, encouraged Island producers to, “Unleash a new vision.” The key to success, she says, is not only good business management. “It has more to do with collaborative community relations. “For too long producers have been insular talking only to each other. To build a sustainable food system, farmers need to tap the energy (support) of the consumer.

Frazer Hunter, a farmer from Nova Scotia and former president of the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture, has been providing farm business management advice for over thirty years. He told the audience of 140 plus that they need to take control of their destiny. “Resource industries are the source of all wealth creation,” he explained. Prince Edward Island is a land flowing with water and energy. Water will soon become the oil of the 21st century and the cellulosic biomass (hay and straw) we grow can be the energy source to heat the Island’s homes.

Will Proctor, Crop Innovation Specialist with PEI Agriculture, concurred with Hunter’s

comments. In his presentation he explained that there is more opportunity for farmers to use biomass to produce heat instead of liquid fuel for transportation. The opportunity, he said, is a local solution. Forty five percent of the Island's energy is used to produce heat. This represents a \$350 million market right here on PEI

Kevin Shiell is the Biotechnology Instructor and Biofermentation Research Project Coordinator at the Centre of Excellence in Agricultural, New Brunswick. He said that energy cost to make ethanol is a limiting factor. His own research revealed that using potatoes for fuel was not promising. He suggested that more research is needed on improving grain varieties before ethanol production could be viable on a scale that would be feasible, given PEI's limited land base.

Richard McEwen, the Island representative with Conestoga-Rovers Engineering, delivered a comprehensive report on the economics of various bio-energy sources that can be produced on PEI. His conclusions were that the economics and environmental impacts dictate small scale initiatives which favour solid fuel for heat rather than liquid fuel for transportation.

Gerard Mol, another Island farmer, grows canola. He told the crowd about his initiative to press canola for a huge, virtually unlimited, international market for non-gmo food grade canola oil. Whatever product he produces that does not meet food grade he plans to use as 'Straight Vegetable Oil (SVO) fuel in his farm vehicles. SVO, he explained is commonly used in Europe. It produces no chemical waste, is cheaper to make than bio-diesel, is better for the environment and will improve the performance of the engine.

John Jamieson, Communications Officer for the PEI Federation of Agriculture, talked about 'Growing the Margins.' A term he borrowed from an annual conference in Ontario that teaches farmers how to produce on-farm energy to displace fuel costs. The renewable sector creates jobs, he said, and he believes that energy and food have more potential on PEI if they are grown for local markets rather than as global commodities.

David Daughton, the Regional Coordinator for the Canadian Community Economic Development Network, concluded the day by stating that many of the ideas expressed over the course of the conference were not necessarily new but that they take time to become accepted. He emphasized that community based power and local food systems are resilient, diversified and more able to sustain the rural economy.

History has repeatedly proven, he said, that collaboration trumps competition. When the goal is community development and the revitalization of the economy, Daughton explained that locally owned cooperative businesses have proven to be a more valuable asset than foreign capital.

ACAAF Program Provides Positive Impact on Island Agriculture and Agri-Food Sectors

The following project summaries illustrate the impact of PEI ADAPT's ACAA program in the agricultural and agri-food industry.

In each case the project was conceived in response to certain issues or constraints affecting the

ongoing viability or future development of a sector in Prince Edward Island. The project participants have attempted to investigate or evaluate particular options for dealing with challenges to the viability of existing industry sectors, and/or opportunities or constraints on perceived opportunities.

Editor's Note: In the coming weeks we will be reporting on additional success stories that would not have been implemented without major financial support from ADAPT's ACAA program.

PEI Future Farmers

Farm Succession Planning and On-Farm Energy Conservation

Background

There are a growing number of farm operations in Prince Edward Island with no successor in place to continue the operations. Traditionally one or more of a farmer's children would expect to take over the operation on the retirement of the parents.

Successive years of poor returns from the marketplace in the traditional crops of potatoes, beef and other commodities have discouraged many young people from taking over farms which are currently in operation.

At the same time widespread reports about the persistent lack of returns in financial terms make it very unlikely that many of the farms without a traditional successor will attract buyers interested in continuing the operations.

Project

The Prince Edward Island ADAPT Council has assisted the P.E.I. Young Farmers Association with funding for several projects including; Future Farmers Conferences in 2006 and 2007, Farm Succession Planning and On-Farm Energy Conservation.

Goals

The goals of the Young Farmers reflected in their various activities, workshops and ongoing projects, include assisting with farm succession planning, diversification of crops, and on-farm energy conservation.

Summary

The Future Farmers Conference was very successful with many people attending. The government should put more funding into that states Nicolas McCardle of the P.E.I. Young Farmers.

An On-Farm Energy Conservation Project sponsored by the Future Framers group is currently ongoing.

Developing a Sustainable Procurement Policy

According to the Municipality of Whistler's Sustainable Purchasing Guide, sustainable purchasing considers including social, environmental, financial and performance factors in purchasing decisions in a systematic way.

On Thursday, March 13th, John Colton, Chair of the Centre for Rural Sustainability and an Associate of The Natural Step Canada hosted a webinar (on-line seminar) with Ted Battiston, Manager of Sustainability Initiatives for the Resort Municipality of Whistler. Using The Natural Step framework, Whistler has developed a cutting-edge sustainability vision and a plan for getting there. As part of this process, they put in place a Sustainable Purchasing Guide in 2006.

To review Whistler's sustainable procurement policy see:

http://www.atlanticsustainability.ca/downloads/procurement/Whistler_PurchasingGuide2006.pdf

For more information about ACSI, see: www.atlanticsustainability.ca

Canola Protein Shows Anti-diabetes Potential

By Stephen Daniells; foodnavigator.com news

14-Apr-2008 - Substituting milk proteins for proteins from rapeseed (canola) could delay the onset of insulin resistance and protect against diabetes, suggests a new study with rats.

The results, if they can be repeated in humans, indicate the potential importance of dietary protein for insulin control, suggest the authors in the British Journal of Nutrition.

"This effect is important inasmuch as it is of a magnitude similar to that afforded by the dual substitution of n-3 polyunsaturated fat for saturated fat and starch for sucrose," wrote lead author Francois Mariotti from France's Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique (INRA - UMR914 Nutrition physiology and ingestive behaviour).

"The quality of dietary protein may be an underestimated parameter in dietary strategies against the metabolic syndrome."

For the complete story see: <http://www.foodnavigator.com/news>

Natural Resources Canada : New Renewable Energy Tool for Farmers

The Government of Canada has unveiled a new resource to help farmers reduce their dependence on conventional energy sources and improve farm sustainability. The Integration of Renewable Energy on the Farm (IREF) Web site is a complete repository of technical information and online tools for analyzing the potential for integrating renewable energy sources onto individual farms. The IREF Web site can be found at www.farm-energy.ca.

New Book Shows Communities How to Achieve Results that Matter

Today's communities face difficult challenges if they want to be tomorrow's healthy, vibrant communities. The challenge for community leaders and citizens is not just to solve specific problems today, but to keep improving their communities tomorrow.

Results that Matter: Improving Communities by Engaging Citizens, Measuring Performance, and Getting Things Done addresses this challenge by providing a new governance framework for

using valuable tools of community improvement to empower communities to achieve the outcomes citizens most desire.

The basis for Results that Matter is the Effective Community Governance Model, which is built on three critical elements of governance: engaging citizens, measuring results, and getting things done. These elements are combined in different ways to find the most effective combination for the community, rather than just “doing” each of these things.

Using the techniques outlined in the book, government and nonprofit managers can achieve not only one-time community or organization improvements, but can foster continual community renewal.

The book offers “how to” guidance to public and nonprofit managers, including promising practices for effective communities, and new roles for citizens, community leaders, and managers. In addition, case examples from 25 communities across the country reinforce the practicality of the framework.

Results that Matter is the collaborative effort of three experts in the field of citizen engagement: Paul D. Epstein, principal of the New York-based consulting firm Epstein and Fass Associates; Paul M. Coates, director of the Office of State and Local Government Programs and associate professor of public policy and administration in the Iowa State University Department of Political Science; and Lyle D. Wray, executive director of the Capitol Region Council of Governments in Hartford, CT.

The book was published by Jossey-Bass in September 2006 and is available at www.josseybass.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-0787960586.html. For additional information, contact Paul Coates at (515) 294-1844 or paulc@iastate.edu.

Therapeutic Gardens Yield Better Physical, Mental and Emotional Health

By Sandra Oberbroeckling

Patients, families and staff at the Center for Rehabilitative Medicine at Mercy Capitol in Des Moines are reaping the benefits of therapeutic gardening thanks to recreation therapist Joyce Ellens and Iowa State University Extension. The Center for Rehabilitative Medicine works with people who have sustained a stroke, spinal cord injury, amputation, or traumatic brain injury to achieve their highest level of independence.

Gardens are an often overlooked element in modern Western medicine. However, according to Erickson, “...somehow we all know that we feel better after we’ve gone for a walk out in nature.” In fact, research shows that therapeutic gardening contributes to better physical, emotional, and mental health and are also beneficial a valuable stress relief tool.

Ellens has incorporated aspects of garden care and maintenance into recreation therapy activities. Planting seedlings, watering plants and harvesting vegetables and preparing them to eat have added a new and enjoyable dimension to her patients’ activities. According to Ellens, feedback from patients, families, and staff about the garden has been overwhelmingly positive.

Those interested in investigating the possibilities for therapeutic gardens on farms for health care facilities, residential care facilities, schools and other public places may find information at the ISU Extension web site useful: www.extension.iastate.edu/store.