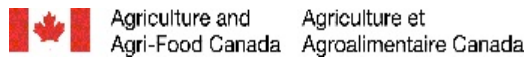




PEI ADAPT Council Agri-Newsletter



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Preserving P. E. I.'s Agricultural Land: Investment Options, Trusts & Ownership Structures

The PEI ADAPT Council invites you to join us, on Thursday November 13, 2008, at the PEI Farm Centre, 420 University Avenue, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, 9:30a.m. - 2:45 p.m.; for an important day of discussion on preserving the land that feeds us; Prince Edward Island's agricultural land. For more information and a detailed agenda visit: www.peiadapt.com

Assessing Farm Economic Viability in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island

Authors: Jennifer Scott and Ronald Colman

- * Are farmers in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island earning enough to stay in business?
- * If not, how will the loss of farms affect jobs and income in rural communities?
- * Do the prices farmers get for farm products cover their costs of production?
- * And how do those prices compare to the cost of food in grocery stores?
- * What, in short, is the future of farming in the Maritimes? — Is farming still a viable institution in the region, and can it survive?

These are some of the provocative questions raised in GPI Atlantic's report on Farm Economic Viability in Nova Scotia and PEI, which examines trends since 1971 in several key indicators of farm economic viability in the two provinces, including:

- * Net farm income
- * Expense to income ratio
- * Farm debt
- * Total debt to net farm income ratio
- * Solvency ratio (total liabilities or debt divided by total assets or capital value of farms)
- * Return on investment

The report also presents the total economic contribution of agriculture to the provincial economies of Nova Scotia and PEI (including direct, indirect, and induced impacts) and to job creation in the two provinces, and it contains specific policy recommendations to improve farm economic viability in the Maritimes.

Report <http://www.gpiatlantic.org/pdf/agriculture/farmviability08.pdf>

Media Coverage <http://www.gpiatlantic.org/clippings/farmecovia.htm>

Press Release http://www.gpiatlantic.org/releases/pr_farmviability08.htm

Uniting Around Food to Save an Ailing Town

By MARIAN BURROS; Published: October 7, 2008; New York Times

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/08/dining/08verm.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1

This town's granite companies shut down years ago and even the rowdy bars and porno theater that once inspired the nickname "Little Chicago" have gone.

Facing a Main Street dotted with vacant stores, residents of this hardscrabble community of 3,000 are reaching into its past to secure its future, betting on farming to make Hardwick the town that was saved by food.

With the fervor of Internet pioneers, young artisans and agricultural entrepreneurs are expanding aggressively, reaching out to investors and working together to create a collective strength never before seen in this seedbed of Yankee individualism.

Rob Lewis, the town manager, said these enterprises have added 75 to 100 jobs to the area in the past few years.

Rian Fried, an owner of Clean Yield Asset Management in nearby Greensboro, which has invested with local agricultural entrepreneurs, said he's never seen such cooperative effort.

"Across the country a lot of people are doing it individually but it's rare when you see the kind of collective they are pursuing," said Mr. Fried, whose firm considers social and environmental issues when investing. "The bottom line is they are providing jobs and making it possible for others to have their own business."

In January, Andrew Meyer's company, Vermont Soy, was selling tofu from locally grown beans to five customers; today he has 350. Jasper Hill Farm has built a \$3.2-million aging cave to finish not only its own cheeses but also those from other cheesemakers.

Pete Johnson, owner of Pete's Greens, is working with 30 local farmers to market their goods in an evolving community supported agriculture program.

"We have something unique here: a strong sense of community, connections to the working landscape and a great work ethic," said Mr. Meyer, who was instrumental in moving many of these efforts forward.

He helped start the Center for an Agricultural Economy, a nonprofit operation that is planning an industrial park for agricultural businesses.

Next year the Vermont Food Venture Center, where producers can rent kitchen space and get business advice for adding value to raw ingredients, is moving to Hardwick from Fairfax, 40 miles west, because, Mr. Meyer said, “it sees the benefit of being part of the healthy food system.” He expects it to assist 15 to 20 entrepreneurs next year.

“All of us have realized that by working together we will be more successful as businesses,” said Tom Stearns, owner of High Mowing Organic Seeds. “At the same time we will advance our mission to help rebuild the food system, conserve farmland and make it economically viable to farm in a sustainable way.”

Cooperation takes many forms. Vermont Soy stores and cleans its beans at High Mowing, which also lends tractors to High Fields, a local compositing company. Byproducts of High Mowing’s operation — pumpkins and squash that have been smashed to extract seeds — are now being purchased by Pete’s Greens and turned into soup. Along with 40,000 pounds of squash and pumpkin, Pete’s bought 2,000 pounds of High Mowing’s cucumbers this year and turned them into pickles

For the past two years, many of these farmers and businessmen have met informally once a month to share experiences for business planning and marketing or pass on information about, say, a graphic designer who did good work on promotional materials or government officials who’ve been particularly helpful. They promote one another’s products at trade fairs and buy equipment at auctions that they know their colleagues need. More important, they share capital. They’ve lent each other about \$300,000 in short-term loans. When investors visited Mr. Stearns over the summer, he took them on a tour of his neighbors’ farms and businesses.

To expand these enterprises further, the Center for an Agricultural Economy recently bought a 15-acre property to start a center for agricultural education. There will also be a year-round farmers’ market (from what began about 20 years ago as one farmer selling from the trunk of his car on Main Street) and a community garden, which started with one plot and now has 22, with a greenhouse and a paid gardening specialist.

Last month the center signed an agreement with the University of Vermont for faculty and students to work with farmers and food producers on marketing, research, even transportation problems. Already, Mr. Meyer has licensed a university patent to make his Vermont Natural Coatings, an environmentally friendly wood finish, from whey, a byproduct of cheesemaking.

These entrepreneurs, mostly well educated children of baby boomers who have added business acumen to the idealism of the area’s long established hippies and homesteaders, are in the right place at the right time. The growing local-food movement, with its concerns about energy usage, food safety and support for neighbors, was already strong in Vermont, a state that the National Organic Farmers’ Association said had more certified organic acreage per capita than any other.

Mr. Meyer grew up on a dairy farm in Hardwick and worked in Washington as an agricultural aide to former Senator Jim Jeffords of Vermont. “From my time in Washington,” Mr. Meyer said, “I recognize that if Vermont is going to have a future in agriculture we need to look at what works in Vermont, and that is not commodity agriculture.” The brothers Mateo and Andy Kehler have found something that works quite well at their Jasper Hill Farm in nearby Greensboro. At first they aged their award-winning cheeses in a basement. Then they began aging for other cheesemakers. Earlier this month they opened their new caves,

with space for 2 million pounds of cheese, which they buy young from other producers. The Vermont Institute for Artisan Cheese at the University of Vermont is helping producers develop safety and quality programs, with costs split by Jasper Hill and the producers. “Suddenly being a cheesemaker in Vermont becomes viable,” Mateo Kehler said.

Pete Johnson began a garden when he was a boy on his family’s land. Now his company, Pete’s Greens, grows organic crops on 50 acres in Craftsbury, about 10 miles north of here. He has four moveable greenhouses, extending the growing season to nine months, and he has installed a commercial kitchen that can make everything from frozen prepared foods and soup stocks to baked goods and sausages. In addition he has enlarged the concept of the C.S.A. by including 30 farmers and food producers rather than just a single farm.

“We have 200 C.S.A. participants so we’ve become a fairly substantial customer of some of these businesses,” he said. “The local beef supplier got an order for \$700 this week; that’s pretty significant around here. We’ve encouraged the apple producer who makes apple pies to use local flour, local butter, local eggs, maple sugar as well as the apples so now we have a locavore apple pie.”

“Twelve years ago the market for local food was lukewarm,” Mr. Johnson added. “Now this state is primed for anything that is local. It’s a way to preserve our villages and rebuild them.”

Like Mr. Johnson, Mr. Stearns of High Mowing Organic Seeds in Wolcott, who is president of the Center, knew he wanted to get into agriculture when he was a boy. His company, which grew from his hobby of collecting seeds, began in 2000 with a two-page catalog that generated \$36,000 in sales. Today he has a million-dollar business, selling seeds all over the United States.

Woody Tasch, chairman of Investors Circle, a nonprofit network of investors and foundations dedicated to sustainability, said: “What the Hardwick guys are doing is the first wave of what could be a major social transformation, the swinging back of the pendulum from industrialization and globalization.”

Mr. Tasch is having a meeting in nearby Grafton next month with investors, entrepreneurs, nonprofit groups, philanthropists and officials to discuss investing in Vermont agriculture.

Here in Hardwick, Claire’s restaurant, sort of a clubhouse for farmers, began with investments from its neighbors. It is a Community Supported Restaurant. Fifty investors who put in \$1,000 each will have the money repaid through discounted meals at the restaurant over four years.

“Local ingredients, open to the world,” is the motto on restaurant’s floor-to-ceiling windows. “There’s Charlie who made the bread tonight,” Kristina Michelsen, one of four partners, said in a running commentary one night, identifying farmers and producers at various tables. “That’s Pete from Pete’s Greens. You’re eating his tomatoes.”

Rosy as it all seems, some worry that as businesses grow larger the owners will be tempted to sell out to companies that would not have Hardwick’s best interests at heart.

But the participants have reason to be optimistic: Mr. Stearns said that within one week six businesses wanted to meet with him to talk about moving to the Hardwick area.

“Things that seemed totally impossible not so long ago are now going to happen,” said Mr. Kehler. “In the next few years a new wave of businesses will come in behind us. So many things are possible with collaboration.”

A New Era for Agriculture

On April 7, 2008, representatives from 61 nations met in Johannesburg, South Africa to adopt a UN Report that proposed urgently needed solutions to the global food system's systemic problems. The International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) asked the question: What must we do differently to overcome persistent poverty and hunger, achieve equitable and sustainable development, and sustain productive and resilient farming in the face of environmental crisis?

To read the entire backgrounder go to: <http://www.foodfirst.org/en/node/2201>

Education on Food Security

As part of the postgraduate certificate program in Food Security, the Chang School of Continuing Education at Ryerson University is offering four courses for Fall 2008. All courses are offered by distance education and delivered via the Internet. Registration is open until the end of the first week in September and first-time applicants should fax their applications to the Chang School.

CFNY 403 Food Security Concepts and Principles

CFNY 404 Food Policy and Programs for Food Security

CFNY 409 Gender and Food Security

CFVN 411 Dimensions of Urban Agriculture

If you wish to register for a course, go to www.ryerson.ca/ce/foodsecurity :

Care of the Soil, Cornerstone of Agriculture

"Having a healthy soil environment is something everybody wants," said Beth McMahon, the executive director of the Atlantic Canada Organic Regional Network.. "It is the foundation of not only organic agriculture but all agriculture and indeed human life itself."

To help explore the topic further, ACORN has been holding a series of workshops throughout the three Maritime provinces with \$27,600 in funding help under the Advancing Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food program.

The final series of workshops is planned for November featuring Fred Magdoff, a long time soil researcher and scientist from Vermont. He will be talking about how to apply soil conservation techniques to the individual farm.

She said the sessions have by no means been restricted to organic producers. In fact, she said about half the crowd at each session has been comprised of conventional producers, soil and crop association representatives and government officials.

Summaries from previous workshops have been placed on the ACORN website and the same procedure will be followed after the November workshop.

The Soil Matters Workshop with Fred Magdoff, in Charlottetown is scheduled for November 10, 2008. For More information see: www.acornorganic.org

One Man's Weed Is Another Man's Livelihood

For a once traditional PEI potato farmer, dandelions aren't a pest; they're a Japanese drink, salad and buyer-based business model by Oliver Moore; Monday's Globe and Mail August 25, 2008 "Most people don't think of the value of the dandelion," says Raymond Loo from his farm in Hunter River, not far from Charlottetown.

Loo's dandelions will be sold to the Japanese market. Roasted and processed, they are consumed as a coffee-like beverage.

Although the plant is considered a pest by most people, top chef Michael Smith values them and said he has incorporated young and tender dandelion greens into his food for years.

"We always got a great reaction because they taste good," he said. "To think of things as weeds is kind of one-dimensional."

Mr. Smith, a Food Network television chef who also lives in PEI, said the greens from Mr. Loo's plants will probably be too bitter by the time the root is big enough to harvest, but he praised the farmer for his willingness to experiment.

"Raymond is very well respected, he's a forward-thinking guy," he said.

"Raymond is a very good example of what it will take for our small family farms to thrive."

Mr. Smith noted that there is an increasingly wide range of food crops this bounty will be showcased during Fall Flavours, a six-day event he is hosting that begins at the end of next month.

"Other crops are increasingly attractive given the declining profits on potatoes, which are still the dominant industry, said John Colwill, president of the PEI Federation of Agriculture.

"We have to work toward farmers being able to get a reasonable return on their investments.

That's been a real challenge the last few years," said the livestock producer from Tyne Valley, in the western part of the island.

"There's no easy answers. I think we have to look at getting a greater percentage of the food dollar."

Formerly a more traditional farmer with potatoes and livestock, Mr. Loo and his wife began looking for ways to differentiate themselves. They went organic and gradually diversified to the point where they have what Mr. Loo called "a whole farm of sidelines."

The idea for dandelions came from a Japanese businessman he was dealing with. Mr. Loo had met the man during a fact-finding trip to Tokyo and Osaka, aimed at learning what the buyers wanted. It was an attempt to get away from the traditional model of farming, which he characterized as relying too much on raising crops and then waiting for buyers to materialize.

Mr. Loo was trying to play on the cultural affinity some Japanese have for the province of Prince Edward Island as he spoke to the businessman.

"He didn't know anything about Anne of Green Gables but he asked his secretary and she knew," Mr. Loo remembered. "He said 'the women do the buying, so I think we'll be okay.'"

They started with black currants and the partnership expanded from there.

"He phoned me and said 'Can you grow dandelions?' and I said, 'I think so,'" Mr. Loo said. The farmer put in the first seeds last year - three rows totalling about 550 metres. He'll be harvesting that first crop this week and is expecting a visit from his Japanese partners around Labour Day.

"I think there's a market for considerably more, but I want to find out how to do it [first]," Mr. Loo said. "It's not as easy as everyone thinks, in spite of how they come up on the lawn."

AAFC's Pest Management Centre Updates

The Pest Management Centre at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada has new information available on its website.

For the latest pest management information (see below), visit the PMC Website

www.agr.gc.ca/prmup

Value Chain Network -aims to improve business collaborations

Collaborate to compete – bring every part of your supply chain into alignment to enhance your business's competitive position. Give your business a boost and learn how to profit from partnering.

A network of provincial value chain programs hopes to encourage greater collaboration between companies in the agriculture and food supply chain. Fall and winter present an opportunity to offer programs, such as *Customer Focused Collaboration- Mastering Value Chain Implementation*, February 24-26 2009 in Burnaby, BC and March 2-4 2009 in Winnipeg, MB. The program offers a chance for farmers, food processors, distributors, retailers and others to gain knowledge and develop skills to identify and create successful strategies and solutions for developing value chains. Network in a highly interactive environment designed to advance the application and management of value chain capabilities.

If you are interested in this and other great training opportunities, contact a value chain representative in your province (In PEI, contact Barbara MacLeod valuechain@eastlink.ca) or check out these links on the upcoming events section on either www.agfoodcouncil.com or www.agric.gov.ab.ca/app21/rtw/index.jsp.

For more information you can also contact: Margurite Thiessen, PHEc., Value Chain Specialist, Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development 780-968-3513.
