



Learn Agri-Food Network

August/September
2007

Supporting agri-preneurs in sharing information with peers to build **businesses** of ag or rural based experiences, products and services.

Report from the June Learn Agri-Food Network Regional Meeting:

Last newsletter we reported that Kathy Meyer makes \$25 per hour making **Coveralls for Kids**. Actually, that's what she'd like to earn. Fortunately if she counted the extra perks of doing a business she loves while living in the community of her choice, then sometimes it feels like a gazillion dollars per hour.

The June 12 Learn Agri-Food meeting was a celebration of winter learning and business development hosted by Heather Porrill at her farm in Bay Tree located between Dawson Creek and Spirit River. The crowd enjoyed a catered lunch, the sharing session and a tour of **Starbright Farm** and its llamas.



*The June Learn Agri-Food Meeting was a great celebration and chance for Heather Porrill to test **Starbright Farm** as a tourist destination. The llamas were a hit.*

Updates from participants:

Heather Porrill now has 17 llamas; 3 goats (Penny, Nickel and Dime), rabbits, 4 horses, kittens, and working dogs. This meeting was a test run to get ready for the **Range Road Ramble** familiarization (FAM) tour (see more on page 3—synergism). Heather even planned to repeat the menu: baked beans with ham, pineapple/cream/pineapple salad, marinated veggies, rye bread, fresh fruit and apple pie squares.

**It's free and everyone is welcome
Learn Agri-Food Network meeting:
Tuesday, September 11, 2007**

In the **South Peace**: 1:15 to 3:15 p.m.
Mini Creek Farm - host, Gerty Sorensen. If you need help, call 568-3308. Discussion: display tools and tricks. Bring an idea you have used (photo or sign) and be prepared to advise others.

West of Bezanson, head north toward Teepee Creek on Highway 733. Go east on Range Road 734. Drive 2 1/4 miles and look for the red buildings in the farm yard on the left (north).

In the **North Peace**: 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.
Peace Country Baskets - host, Julie Gour. If you get lost, phone Julie at (780) 322-2270. Discussion: packaging, including what's needed for regulations and what's important for sales. Bring samples of your packaging or ideas for creating more ideas.

At the northern limits of the town of Nampa, turn west on Highway 683. The pavement will end in 6 miles - keep going a mile and a half. Look for a long row of red graineries and a small sign that says Gours. It's on the right (north).

Gail Briggs can't put a price on the value of business experience. In 2001, she opened her federal plant, **Briggswood Country Preserves**. She says you learn as you go with frustration from time to time. In response to the challenge question:

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*Holly Sorgen and Elaine Stenbraaten in the inspected kitchen at **Starbright Farm**.*



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'why people buy my product?' Gail said, "I'm market driven. If they buy it I'll make it again." She says she uses locally grown products and chooses the best quality ingredients she can find. Gail likes to promote the local link to growers such as Susan & Arnie and Eileen Hintze at Centre 2000 Gift Shop, tells customers that the berries are grown just outside of town.

Gail told this story: a first time buyer, a cowboy at the Dawson Market said, "This is awesome jam." He bought \$55 of jam when he came back to the market the next week. A regular retail customer who stocks her products says: "I can't find anything like it anywhere else." "A taste of yesterday" says a Calgary customer who regularly shops the market with her mom and grandma. Nostalgia value is a pull. A customer from the United Kingdom regularly ships Gail's jams to family over there. Other comments Gail repeated were: "You have a gem of an operation. You are very clean. Your operation is very clean."

Arnie Meyer told the group he has pre-sold this year's saskatoon crop and that a sound reputation is paying off.

In response to the question "why do customers purchase?" Kathy Meyer, **Coveralls for Kids**, says that every sale is a thrill. "You want **my** stuff? It's a neat feeling. I never want to lose it".

Barb Barrs says they are working on a name for their budding tree farm: *Back in the Saddle Hills Tree Farm* is one they're considering. She says most of her pottery sales are for weddings, Christmas, to collectors and to those who want to support local



Starbright Farm Kitchen: Heather Porrill, Kathy Meyer, Holly Sorgen, and Gail Briggs.

products. She also expressed having trouble with marketing.

Holly Sorgen, **Community Futures Grande Prairie & Region** made this her first visit. To introduce herself she said "I lead, listen and network for the Community Futures Grande Prairie board." In October 2005, she accepted the executive director position and she hosted a conference last September 2006 with Kelsey Reimer. At the conference, Holly especially enjoyed the business story of Nadja Pietka and her low fat brownie that she sold to Subway. Jim Hole talked about branding his family's business. We learned from Holly: attend sessions, take away a new thought, create an action.

Elaine Stenbraaten called herself a pathfinder for industry entrepreneurs and shared several good Grow West success stories.

Susan Meyer said she's done a fair amount of conflict negotiation this past winter. Best training included an emotions anonymous conference she attended in Minneapolis last fall. It was a great opportunity.

Karen Goad told people to apply for training scholarships, plan a self guided tour or attend a conference. Karen's contact information is on the last page for more information.

Food Safety is CRITICAL!

Gail Briggs was a professional nurse before turning her attention to local fruits and vegetables and the opportunity to value-add them into preserves. She knows that human safety is critical. Her operation is clean. We should emulate Gail for protection of customers and ourselves. We also must protect our industries. This is an e-mail received by all Alberta Agriculture & Food staff in August, for our own safety. Imagine what this issue does to a business, its employees and the industry as a whole. Do not read it as a good news story for local, but an invocation to 'do it better!'

Mexican carrot health alert

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency is warning the public not to eat Los Angeles Salad Company Genuine Sweet Baby Carrots because the product may be contaminated with shigella. In Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario, they are sold at Costco stores. <http://www.thestar.com/article/247733>

Word of the Month - Synergism

Synergism: The working together of two things (muscles or drugs for example) to produce an effect greater than the sum of their individual effects. In business or community, it's when two or more people or businesses get more impact for each and all by doing something together. Farmers' markets are an obvious example.



Two, count 'em, one, two, Peace Region groups are using **synergism** to tell the rural story to others.

The **Country Sunshine Promenade** did their second annual day (two days this year) to open their farms, businesses and community centres to guests with a 'passport', map and lots of fun things to do. Their promotion included free advertising after the fact in a variety of newspapers,

The Corn Maze was one of the stops on the familiarization tour of the **Range Road Ramblers**. This photo is of the Halwa operation at Country Roads RV Park. www.countryroadsrvpark.com



In and around the Dine Alberta material:

www.dinealberta.ca is a link to see the list of restaurants involved and the list of producers who are



making their products available for purchase by those chefs. You might want to check it out to:

1. patronize the restaurants as you spend your away from home food dollars in September,
2. recommend organizations or agencies planning for food at meetings, use these restaurants and caterers - you know they are supportive of Alberta and local.
3. check out the web sites and product lines of other producers - to compare, to learn.

In addition, the **Food for Thought** magazine, that is free and available at a variety of places, including grocery stores, will have an insert in their fall issue with the restaurants. When you see one, pick up two and gift someone you know the other so they too can find the restaurants. If you can't find one, it's available on line: www.growingalberta.com

Areas in the Peace:

Bay Tree
Evergreen Park
Grande Prairie
Peace River
Valhalla



Dine Alberta is coming to the Peace. Rick's Place on the main floor of Grande Prairie's office tower has been in the program from the start. Colette Zich is most approachable if you want to 'practice' meeting a chef.

She even plans to get involved in the 'distribution project'. We are going to study ways to move local products to retail outlets and food service.

For Peace Region agricultural entrepreneurs.

Learn Agri-Food Network

Team includes: Gail Briggs and Jerry Kitt, as well as:

Alberta Agriculture & Food

Elaine Stenbraaten

Fairview

835-7531

Karen Goad

Grande Prairie

538-5629

Cindy Cuthbert

Grande Prairie

538-5287

Sherry Smith

Layout/Design

Grande Prairie

538-6208

Susan Meyer

Publisher

Grande Prairie

538-5630

Fax: 538-5288

susan.meyer@gov.ab.ca

Nicole McMullan

PREDA

538-5635

Gary Christopherson

Consultant, Grimshaw

338-2000

Send submissions to Sherry.

For toll free calling of all government staff dial 310-0000 first.

The Learn Agri-Food Network Team helps agri-preneurs build profitable businesses to grow their industries. Members look at business issues and apply them to the larger industry by supplying knowledge and information, reducing business development barriers and identifying resources.

We help reduce the tuition in the school of hard knocks.

Learn Agri-Food Events to Attend

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More information on Page 1.

Farm Women's Conference November 15 & 16, 2007 at the Grande Prairie Inn

Farm Women's Conference
The thirtieth annual celebration of women in the rural Peace. As always the best part is meeting others but as always the speakers and topics range from how to hobbies, to personal development to ways to farm better. Get a registration form and take a friend to Grande Prairie

Learn Agri-Food Meeting Tuesday, October 9

To be announced.

Learn Agri-Food Network News:

The Distribution study

On August 27, a consultant and agency representatives meet with interested producers and processors as well as a couple food service businesses in August. Discussion will include what issues to address in a study that might lead to possible solutions to get Peace region product to buyers—maybe restaurants, stores, tourism outlets, and perhaps even camp kitchens. At the June LAF meeting we heard that Holly Sorgen wants to attend meetings and got commitment from Heather, Gail, Doug, Darlene, Eldine as participants. The group advised that a marketer is needed to layer onto the study. That's the part everyone finds difficult. If you are interested in this project, just count yourself 'in' by calling Elaine, Susan or Karen. Look left for contact information.



Nutrition Labelling—follow-up from the spring workshops

The Peace Value Added Food and Ag Association paid the testing lab bill for **Rosewood Meadows** nutrient analysis after they won the draw at the workshop. Gail Briggs and Heather Porrill both just bought the computer nutrient analysis/labeling program. Call Dan Prudholme, Gail or Heather for more information on either method.

We're on the web:

www.peacecountrycanada.com

Look for Culture of Innovation and then Learn Agri-Food