



Learn Agri-Food Network

September/October
2007

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

Report from the September Learn Agri-Food Network Regional Meetings:

North Peace:

The September LAF meeting was held at the home of Julie Gour. Julie operates Peace Country Baskets which features a variety of Peace products in every gift basket. Julie showed us her work room and product inventory including the popular heat bags for the neck. She told us how the manufacturer was able to improve the design of the heat bags through feedback Julie provided from her customers. Julie also discussed product packaging and what she needs as a customer. She's looking for high quality, professional packaging. It must be appealing, secure, appropriately labeled, scent-proof and able to withstand shipping. For instance, bar soap packaging must look as good after handling as it does before and it must prevent the fragrance of the soap from transferring to other products in the basket.



Julie Gour showing off one her baskets in her work area.

Chris Sleger talked about the challenges she's facing getting ready to sell her lambs. Chris is gearing up to market freezer lamb and wonders if she's ready. We also chatted about the wool fibre market and brainstormed business solutions to counter the current low prices.

**It's free and everyone is welcome
Learn Agri-Food Network meeting:
Tuesday, October 9, 2007**

In the **South Peace**: 1:15 to 3:15 p.m.
Host: Teresa Romney. Directions: North on Hwy 733. West on township road 732 for 1.5 miles (between RR 34 and 35). Tan double wide with dark green trim is on north side of the road. Look for a long driveway. Phone 780-568-3782

In the **North Peace**: 1:15 to 3:15 p.m.
Meet at Alexander's Restaurant in Rycroft. Join us in the restaurant for lunch at noon if you can.

The next Learn Agri-Food Network meeting will be on Tuesday, November 13. Look for location details in the Oct/Nov Newsletter.



*Julie Gour and
Chris Sleger
demonstrating the
heat bags for your
neck.*

South Peace:

Gerty Sorensen hosted a fun filled Learn Agri-Food meeting at her house September 11. The conversation covered everything from product pricing to finding appropriate packaging at a reasonable cost, opportunities at farmers' markets and the challenges in designing on-farm retail space. The highlight of the meeting was a product taste test. Salsa and chocolate were the tested products. Mmm, mmm good!

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How Much is that Lamb Chop in the Freezer?

“Pricing is really hard,” says Gerty. “Farmers always under-price. We’re in business and have to price accordingly. If my lamb costs me \$4.00/lb to produce I should retail it for at least \$9.00 as I have to cover the cost of storage and distribution as well as make a profit.”



Gerty Sorensen taste testing the 3 different salsas at the Learn Agri-Food Meeting.

Small is Beautiful

Once you figure out price then comes the question of where to sell your products. If you opt for an on-farm retail outlet how big do you need? Heather Porrill took in the Alberta Gift Show in Edmonton in August and learned that size doesn’t matter. Her retail/display case is a cupboard in her permitted kitchen facility. It works. A farm direct operation in Ontario also subscribes to the small is ample philosophy. Chudleigh’s farm market near Milton has a really small retail space but it works. It’s well laid out and product turn over is fast. Valta Bison Farms is opening a 400 sq ft retail space in the Ramsay section of Calgary later this month. Small is fine!

Eye Appeal

At the Gift Show Heather picked up a tonne of packaging ideas. She saw a beautiful tin that would set off her melt-in-your-mouth caramels perfectly and was inundated with lots of sturdy cellophane options ideal for holding three small jars of preserves stacked on top of



each other and tied with a bow. She has good cello bag contact, Meyers Packaging, in Edmonton. Call her for details if you’re interested at 780-353-3055

Gerty is keeping her eye peeled for packaging ideas and wholesale suppliers, too. She shared the brochure from a newly identified source, AmPak at 12822 148 Street in Edmonton. She also showcased some of the product samples her daughter picked up on a summer holiday in the Okanagan. Check out the companies’ websites www.logbarn.ca or www.tasteoftheokanagan.com.

Signs Bring Customers

Gerty and Teresa Romney, a first year vendor at the Bezanson Farmers’ Market, reported on the market’s very successful first season. “Our venue offers marketing opportunities galore for anyone wanting to sell a product,” says Teresa. “I can’t believe the amount of customer traffic at the market and we’re only in our first year. I’ve far exceeded my expectations.”

“Signage has made a big difference” says Gerty. “Our highway signs bring people in to the market. We were slower before the signs were in place.”

Taste Testing

We had a fun-time trying 3 different tomato salsas and orange chocolate drops. The salsas included one from Lori Hoag, a vendor at the Bezanson market and two from Gerty’s daughter. The heat, sweetness and colour varied but each had their own appeal. We came up with three first place entries!

Heather picked up some beautiful orange chocolate buds at the Gift Show that she shared with the group. Their smooth, melt in your mouth texture, distinctive orange flavour and true orange colour kept us brainstorming uses with every lick. Again, Heather has the contact information for this Edmonton supplier.



New Peace Ag and Agri-food Business Directory

The Branding the Peace Country Association is building a Peace Ag and Agri-food Business Directory. They're seeking Peace agripreneurs interested in being listed. If you're not ready to be listed, refer a friend who is!

Wanted: participating entrepreneurs. Who are growing/crafting (sheep, elk, produce, crafts, rural based services, soaps, artistic ironwork, etc.) and where they are located.

Requirement: must be prepared and able to consistently supply the Peace foodservice and retail industries the product requested in quantities required when they are needed. Businesses must be located in the AB or BC Peace and legally able to sell to the public in AB and/or BC.

Contact Heather Porriell **NOW!** Phone 780-353-3050 or e-mail porriell@telusplanet.net for information or to register.

Are Your Employees Really "The Best"?

Eckert AgriMarketing is conducting a new online survey of farms that sell directly to the public or offer entertainment on the farm. The survey is studying how North American retail farms recruit, interview, select, hire and train customer-oriented employees.

To participate in the survey, go to www.eckertagrimarketing.com, and scroll to the bottom right and find the link that reads "click here for the employee survey." Survey participants will be the first to receive a report.

Natural Foods Buying Club

Annette Rosendal is coordinating a Natural Foods Buying Club which offers a monthly organic and natural dry goods and fresh produce service. She is looking for producers to supply local/regional products (ie: fresh fruit and vegetables when in season, organic and grassfed meat, honey, cereal mixes, jams, etc).

Contact Annette Rosendal at 780-624-0653 or e-mail: peacefullpantry@hotmail.com

Farm Wife Wanted!!!

Qualifications:

- * multi-skilled (Jill-of-all-trades)
- * strong and healthy
- * cooperative and agreeable
- * adaptable to any adverse situation
- * ESP and go-fer abilities
- * excellent book balancing skills
- * looks like fashion queen in blue jeans and gum boots
- * cooks like mother under any circumstances
- * full-time mom, hired hand, loving wife, vet, fencer, mechanic, truck driver, seamstress, housekeeper etc.
- * loves working without help but loves helping others
- * enjoys the outdoors in any weather – any time
- * angel by day – devil by night



If this ad applies to you then plan to attend the 30th Annual Farm Women's Conference November 15th & 16th, 2007 at the Grande Prairie Inn

All farm women and non-farm women welcome!
Pick up registrations at the following offices:
Alberta Agriculture – call Cindy toll free at 310-0000, then 780-538-5287
By calling Melinda Trudel at 780-494-2627
At your local municipal district office
At your local AFFC office

EARLY BIRD DEADLINE: OCTOBER 25, 2007
REGISTRATION DEADLINE: NOVEMBER 5, 2007

Healthy Food Products Survey

A provincial approach to increasing food and health innovation is underway. Until October 15th, AB Agriculture and Food is surveying food processors on their experience and interest in producing healthy food products. The results will be used to identify key barriers to new initiatives in this market, and help to identify tools and resources that could assist industry. The survey should take about 10-15 minutes to complete. Upon completion of the survey, your name is automatically entered to win a Blackberry Wireless Handheld device. To complete the survey on-line, go to: www.agric.gov.ab.ca/healthyfood

For Peace Region agricultural entrepreneurs.

Learn Agri-Food Network Team includes: Gail Briggs and Jerry Kitt, as well as:

**Alberta Agriculture & Food
Elaine Stenbraaten**

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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

**Learn Agri-Food Meeting
Tuesday,
October 9,
2007**

In the **South Peace**: 1:15 to 3:15 p.m. Host, Teresa Romney.

In the **North Peace**: 1:15 to 3:15 p.m. Alexander's Restaurant in Rycroft.

More information on Page 1.

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

Farm Women's Conference

The 30th annual celebration of women in the rural Peace. As always the best part is meeting other Farm women, the speakers and topics range from "how to" hobbies, to personal development, to ways to farm better. Pick up a registration form and take a friend to Grande Prairie on November 15 & 16, 2007. For more information call Cindy Cuthbert at 780-538-5287.

**The Power of the Land
November 2,
2007 at the
Douglas J.
Cardinal
Theatre,
Grande Prairie
Regional
College**

The Power of the Land—A Fundraiser for the Grande Prairie Farmers Market Building Fund. Join local visual artists, writers and musicians in celebrating the land and hands that sustain us and meet the local farmers who are growing world class food: Red Willow Gardens, Glendean Farms, Harmony's Way Farm, Bridgeview Gardens, Smoky Gardens, Ridge Valley Colony, Pirkir's Apiary and Grandview Colony. Tickets available through Second Street Theatre Box Office 780-538-1616 or

www.poweroftheland.com

Learn Agri-Food Network News:

Take the Product Distribution Challenge

Be part of finding an innovative solution to a common business challenge. Our small volume agri-preneurs tell us how frustrating it can be to deliver products to customers and to receive required inputs when and where they're needed. Shippers often can't handle less than full truckloads efficiently and effectively and they don't like rural delivery or pick ups. These issues impact small processors, restaurants and caterers alike. As agri-preneurs you're left with the frustrating task of finding alternate methods of distribution. At what cost in terms of time and money?

Join the Peace Value-Added Food and Ag Association's *Distribution in the Peace* project to be part of the creative solution to our rural distribution challenge. Working with an expert in logistics and shipping, you'll have the opportunity to identify workable solutions and test at least one right here in the Peace region. The project starts in mid October. Contact Karen, Susan or Elaine **NOW** for information.

RENEWAL

Canada

The Agricultural Policy Framework (APF)
A FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL-TERRITORIAL INITIATIVE

Alberta

We're on the web:

www.peacecountrycanada.com

Look for Culture of Innovation and then Learn Agri-Food