

For Immediate Release

Step It Up in Leduc February 6 & 7, 2008

Alberta's farm direct gurus are gathering. Are you ready to meet them? Join some of Alberta's top farm direct marketers and farmers' market managers February 6 and 7 at the **Step It Up** conference in Leduc. Learn from the leaders and grow your farmers' market or farm direct business.

Farm direct marketing is more than putting up a sign and opening your gates. You need to understand why consumers want to buy from you. Freshness, energy conservation, choice, food safety fears and contributing to the local economy are just some of the reasons they buy local. People want to connect with the farmers who are growing their food. They want to take home a memorable family experience as well as great food. How do you do that?

Leona Staples of The Jungle Farm near Innisfail says, "We've increased our sales by adding special events. Hosting school tours, a jam festival and a fall celebration keep our customers coming back throughout the year." In the spring the Staples welcome customers to their greenhouse where they offer a u-plant activity. After planting, Staples look after the potted plants until they can be put outside. The flower baskets are a fund raising venture for youth groups, churches and schools.

Leona will join forces with Patty Milligan, Lola Canola Honey in Bon Accord to present **Ideas, Ideas...we've got ideas** to increase sales by adding special events to your farm direct operation or farmers' market.

"Creating a 'sensorial' experience allows Gwen Simpson of Inspired Market Gardens in Carvel to market her all-natural culinary herbs, edible and heritage flowers and gourmet salads. "Whether you visit our farm, meet us at the market or as a chef order produce from us, you have our commitment to unique products and superb quality," says Gwen. "The production, preparation and distribution of high quality, nutritious foods is a complex labour-intensive process especially if you are a small producer with only a few products. Telling stories and providing a value-added 'hands-on' experience can become a point of distinction and make for repeat customers willing to pay a real price for real food."

Ten years ago Patricia and Bob Clark started their ostrich farm in Calgary for meat and breeding stock but soon found that ostrich oil makes the best soap in the world. After taking a soap making course Patricia developed her wildly popular Essence of the Nile body product line. "Now we market all of our meat, body products, feather and leather products, and craft eggs through farmers' markets and Christmas shows. We've grown to the point where we sell everything but the squeak," says Patricia.

Patricia, Gwen and Lynette Westfall of Valley K Greenhouses will share their stories and the challenges they face in **Growing Your Business**.

Nine conference sessions and three keynote presentations will be offered at **Step It Up** February 6 & 7, 2008. Other topics include: marketing food safely, cashing in on local foods, developing a farm store, marketing meat, community shared agriculture, handling cash, creating successful farmers' markets and more.

Step It Up is all about cultivating creativity, strengthening networks, diversifying agriculture and investing in the future of agriculture. Brought to you by the Alberta Farmers' Market Association and the Alberta Farm Fresh Producers Association in co-operation with the Ag Policy Framework Renewal Chapter and the Agriculture and Food Council ACAA program, it's coming to Leduc. See you there!

Call NOW to register. Seating is limited. Phone toll free (800) 661-2642 for information and registration details. Email director@albertamarkets.com or webmaster@albertafarmfresh.com. Final registration deadline is January 25, 2008.

Funding for **Step It Up** is made available through the Agriculture and Food Council which is responsible for delivering Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Advancing Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food (ACAAF) program in Alberta.

Karen Goad

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Peace Country Sun, Direct Currents, The Market Express, Fruit Facts

