



# Agri-News

July 28, 2008

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## Seed to Salad – Growing Food for Learning

Bringing agriculture into the classroom through indoor gardens is an idea and an exercise that is starting to grow in Edmonton area schools. Schools that participated in the **Seed to Salad** program have reported some amazing student experiences.

Students experience the growing cycle of vegetables, herbs, fruit and flowers by learning first-hand about the whole food production cycle. The students gain a direct and personal understanding of how plants are grown and harvested for food as they water, transplant, prune and harvest their own vegetables that they use to prepare fresh salads, fruit skewers and soup. The whole growing cycle takes about four months in the classroom.

Dolores Andressen's Grade 2 class from Bertha Kennedy Catholic Community School in St. Albert grew everything from zucchini to watermelon. She observed, "The students' relationship with food has changed over the last months as the delicate plants have matured and produced something edible."

Teaching students about the connections between food, farming and the environment is a mandate of Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development's agricultural education and training branch. "Projects like this show kids the environmental impacts of food production," Andressen says, "Growing food at home means you don't have to burn fuel for transportation and that helps fight climate change."

Classroom gardens excite children about coming to school. A participating Grade 2/3 teacher, Karen Krasowki-Payne from Sifton Elementary School in Edmonton, saw her students develop dedication and a sense of responsibility to care for the plants. "During the cold spell in February other students stayed home during the minus 30...but my students came to school to see if the plants would make it through the cold spell. Before school started, the children would press their noses against the window...so that they could get a better look. Every morning, the children rushed to the plants to note any changes."

"The gardens can enrich science lessons and this project connects children with growing food and eating fresh vegetables," says Brent Andressen, agriculture education coordinator. "A lot of the time, people see food in the store and they don't make the connection that someone grew that."

But not any more – this project is changing minds. "Students and teachers alike now have a greater appreciation of the

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## This Week

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quantity and selection of produce available to us,” says Dolores Andressen. “Many students are now growing their own vegetables at home. I wouldn’t be surprised if some of our students find careers in agriculture.”

The garden kits available through the *Seed to Salad* program include fluorescent grow lamps, watering containers, soil and seeds. The kits are supplied by Garden Retreat in Calgary and distributed through the CityFarm Little Green Thumbs program in Edmonton.

To learn more about indoor school gardens, contact Brent Andressen at 780-427-4225. To learn more about agricultural education and training branch initiatives, sign up for the Green Certificate eNewsletter online at [www.agriculture.alberta.ca/greencertificate](http://www.agriculture.alberta.ca/greencertificate).

Contact: Brent Andressen  
780-427-4225

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## Why Buy a Berry Harvester When You Can Get the Job Done Free?

A large percentage of the Alberta berry and fruit crop is sold directly to consumers at the farm via pick-you-own or U-Pick operations. These enterprising and interactive operations have found a way to eliminate the need for large capital inputs such as a harvester. When the customer is the harvester, they even pay to do the job.

“Alberta’s growing berry industry primarily consists of strawberries, raspberries and saskatoons, but is also expanding into black currants, sour cherries, Haskap (edible honeysuckles), apples, and other bush and tree fruits,” says Lloyd Hausher, provincial fruit industry development specialist with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, Brooks. “Berry farms are located throughout Alberta and, although most prefer to sell by U-Pick methods, many also sell pre-picked berries at the farm and some also sell at farmers’ markets.”

With consumers continually hearing stories about the health benefits of eating local and the 100 mile diet for example, the Alberta Farm Fresh Producers Association report that they expect demand for locally grown fresh Alberta berries will far out-strip supply this year and that consumers should be making plans early to obtain their share. To find a local berry producer, visit the association’s website at [www.albertafarmfresh.com](http://www.albertafarmfresh.com).

Farmers and acreage holders who are looking for ways to diversify their business without investing huge sums of money for harvesters, tractors or other large equipment, may want to consider talking advantage of this increasing demand for berries. Now is the time to start planning and preparing the land or site for planting next spring.

Both the Alberta Farm Fresh Producers Association and Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development can be of assistance.

Contact: Lloyd Hausher  
403-362-1309

Alberta Ag-Info Centre  
310-FARM (3276)

Alberta Farm Fresh Producers Association  
1-800-661-2642

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## Fertilizer Prices Affect the Value of Hay and Straw

The dramatic rise of fertilizer prices over the last year may be old news, but the effects of these increased input costs are still surprising. High fertilizer costs could affect hay, greenfeed and straw prices. Animal feed that is produced and harvested in one area and fed in another will export a lot of nutrients, and the fertility of that producing land will decline if these nutrients are not replaced as fertilizer or manure. The replacement cost of these nutrients needs to be built into the price of feed.

“Fertilizer prices have been volatile since the fall of 2007, and this has even carried into summer months when prices are usually stable due to low demand,” says Doon Pauly, crop specialist with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, Brooks. “In an ever-changing market it is hard to come up with concrete prices, so, for the purpose of this article I have assumed some product costs that are hopefully close to realistic for much of Alberta.”

Table 1. Estimated Fertilizer Costs Summer 2008

	N	P2O5	K2O	S04
Product	46-0-0	11-52-0	0-0-62	20.5-0-0-24
\$/tonne	\$1100	\$1,500	\$575	\$550
\$/lb actual	\$1.08	\$1.08	\$0.42	\$0.17

Note – these costs have accounted for the nitrogen component of phosphate and sulphate fertilizers

“Using these estimated fertilizer values and average feed analysis, the fertilizer replacement costs in various feeds ranges from about \$39 per ton for straw to over \$94 per ton for alfalfa hay, as shown in Table 2,” says Pauly. “Keep in mind that these are only some of the expenses tied up in this feed and do not include any of the costs of cutting or baling.

“These values are also built on the assumption that any replacement fertilizer is 100 per cent efficient. In reality, fertilizer efficiency is lower than this and fertilizer is even more costly to replace. Although some may question the accuracy of these numbers, what they clearly indicate is that the nutrients in feed are valuable and need to be considered when setting prices.”

Table 2. Nutrient Content and Fertilizer Replacement Costs in Various Feeds\*

	lb N/ton	lb P <sub>2</sub> O <sub>5</sub> /ton	lb K <sub>2</sub> O/ton	lb S/ton	Total Fertilizer Replacement Cost \$/ton
<b>Alfalfa</b>	58	10.5	43.6	6.2	<b>\$94.29</b>
<b>Barley Greenfeed</b>	37	9.6	29	4.7	<b>\$63.98</b>
<b>Brome</b>	31	7.3	35.1	3.2	<b>\$57.15</b>
<b>Orchardgrass</b>	41	9.6	46	5.8	<b>\$75.77</b>
<b>Timothy</b>	26	6.9	30.1	2.8	<b>\$49.08</b>
<b>Oats Greenfeed</b>	32	9.6	43.6	4.4	<b>\$64.62</b>
<b>Barley Straw</b>	17.3	4.1	36.8	3.0	<b>\$38.96</b>

\*From 10 Year Average Analysis of Alberta Feeds 1984-1994, [http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/\\$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/anim3780?opendocument](http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/anim3780?opendocument)

“High fertilizer prices seem to be a new reality and are not surprising anymore,” notes Pauly. “What is unexpected sometimes is how these prices affect farming practices and products. Hay and greenfeed have value not just as animal feeds, but also on the basis of their fertilizer replacement value. Even straw, which is often viewed as waste product, may contain over \$39 per ton of fertilizer equivalent. Fertilizer prices have made the nutrients in feed quite valuable, and buyers and sellers should take this into consideration when setting hay, greenfeed and straw prices.”

Contact: Doon Pauly  
Alberta Ag-Info Centre  
310-FARM (3276)

## The 32nd Annual Provincial Beef Heifer Show

The 32nd Provincial Beef Heifer Show helped prove that the 4-H program develops strong youth leadership and provides opportunities for members to enhance existing and develop new skills. Olds Agricultural Society was home to over 120 4-H members and cattle for the four-day event. “This show has been around for 32 years now, and just keeps getting better and better,” says volunteer organizational committee member and long-time exhibitor Amanda High.

For a second year, the *You're Hired* segment for senior members was very popular. Giving senior members another opportunity to develop life skills, the competition featured three possible job placement opportunities. Each participating member was required to submit a resume and experience an interview process. After completing the interview processes, members were allowed to ask questions, and were given advice on how to improve their skills.

The team grooming event for junior and intermediate members had teams of two pitted against the clock in an effort to groom an animal utilizing each others skills and knowledge in only 10 minutes. Ambassador volunteer Kari Bergerud was

amazed by the skill development members were getting during the event. “It was great to see juniors being so passionate about learning,” she said. “It made volunteering that much more exciting, I felt like I was learning along with them.”

The showmanship class gave 4-H members a chance to see the show ring through another pair of eyes in the Show Team Judging Contest. Exhibitors sign up for the chance to act as ringman or judge for a group of volunteer animals and show people.

Conformation classes highlighted 4-Hers' talent and dedication. **Alissa Hagel**, Irricana 4-H Beef & Multi Club, had the Supreme Champion Crossbred Female, while **Anthony Murphy** of the Lakedell 4-H Beef Club had the Reserve. West Carstairs 4-H Beef Club's **Shallaine Daley** exhibited the Supreme Champion Purebred Female with her Grand Champion Simmental while **Kristen Goad** of the Clandonald 4-H Beef Club showed her Grand Champion Red Angus to Reserve Supreme honours.

The prestigious Grand Aggregate Awards were presented to Daley and Murphy in the Junior and Senior Divisions respectively, while **John Murphy**, also of the Lakedell 4-H Beef Club, won the Intermediate Aggregate Award.

A new *Friend of the Provincial 4-H Beef Heifer Show* was recognized for the first time since 2005. **Colleen Prefontaine**, of Bon Accord, was named to this exclusive list based on her 15 years of committed volunteerism to the show. She was among the very first on the volunteer-based organizational committee, and has been a mainstay of the program for the past decade and a half. “Colleen is the heart and soul of this show and Alberta's 4-H beef female project,” says Rob Smith, regional 4-H specialist and program coordinator, with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, Airdrie.

The *Gerald Kujala 4-H Spirit Award* was presented, in its inaugural year, to **Aidan Jamieson** of the Bow Valley Beef & Multi 4-H Club for his positive attitude, sportsmanship, dedication and perseverance.

“We have an unusually large number of first time exhibitors and it is always refreshing to see expressions of enlightenment

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to match the smiles of joy at the Provincial Beef Heifer Show,” Smith remarked. “We have a great mix of both guys and girls from every region across the province, with more current members playing an active role as program organizers. Their life skills at this point put the future of the Provincial Beef Heifer Show in great hands.”

Sponsors of the 32nd annual Provincial Beef Heifer Show are Apache Canada Ltd., Penn West Energy Trust, AMA Insurance, Alberta Beef Producers, Gas Alberta Inc. and Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development. The Olds Agricultural Society is a Beef Heifer Show supporter.

For a full list of the results, visit the 4-H website [www.4h.ab.ca](http://www.4h.ab.ca). For more information on the Beef Heifer Show, please call Smith at 403-948-8501.

*Contact: Rob Smith  
403-948-8501*

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## **Scholarships for the Young-at-Heart Agri-preneur**

Agri-preneurs can learn a lot when they take or make an opportunity to see how others handle a business similar to theirs. Learning new techniques to attract customers is something that can benefit any business.

“Learning can happen in many different ways,” says Marian Williams, farm direct marketing specialist with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, Camrose. “Some call it self-directed learning which can entail visiting businesses, researchers and other knowledgeable individuals, or attending

a conference, workshop or business training session.”

Consider asking about a scholarship to take business training, attend workshops, conferences related to for your farm direct marketing or ag-tourism business. The scholarships can be applied to training that is national or international in scope that will allow applicants to bring back ideas to share as well as to grow their own operation.

“To develop a self-directed learning plan, an agri-preneur needs to decide what they need to know and make a plan to research and study it on their own,” says Williams. “Doing a quick review of what needs to be learned or which business skills need to be improved is a good first step. If new ideas for marketing or more efficient processes are what are needed, a self-directed learning plan can be a great opportunity to capture some specific information and bring it back to the business. It is said that good ideas can be borrowed from others and duplicated at home. Part of good management is taking the initiative to learn from others.”

For more information on the agri-preneur scholarship program call Williams at 780-679-5168 for an application package or e-mail [marian.williams@gov.ab.ca](mailto:marian.williams@gov.ab.ca).

“Albertans who are awarded an agri-preneur scholarship are expected to report back and share what was learned,” says Williams. “Teaching new skills and sharing new ideas is one of the best ways to retain information.”

*Contact: Marian Williams  
780-679-5168  
Susan Meyer  
780-538-5630*

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## **Agri-News Briefs**

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### **Call of the Land Podcast**

For over 50 years *Call of the Land* has broadcast its information and extension program on 27 radio stations throughout the province. Now it's going more high tech and is available as a podcast. A podcast is very similar to a radio broadcast, except that it is broadcast on the internet using digital media files. *Call of the Land* can now be listened to as a podcast on a computer, an MP3 player or through a web

browser. Podcasts are provided free of charge. You can subscribe to the podcast, and learn more about podcasts on the *Call of the Land* homepage on Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development's website at [www.agriculture.alberta.ca/app21/podcasts](http://www.agriculture.alberta.ca/app21/podcasts). *Call of the Land* is also available through iTunes.