Celebrate with safety!

September 2005 marks Alberta’s Centennial, and across the province, communities are celebrating. September is also part of the busiest farming season, and many farmers will be swathing or combining rather than attending a community event.

For Alberta’s agricultural community, a safe harvest will be the best way to celebrate 100 years as a province. Laurel Aitken, farm safety coordinator with Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development suggests that farmers celebrate Alberta’s centennial by staying safe and healthy on the farm this fall.

“There are 50,000 farmers in this province providing food for Albertans and for people around the world,” says Aitken. “This is an incredibly important industry, but also an industry with many hazards in the workplace. In Alberta, there are an average of 18 farm related deaths per year, and over 1,000 more farm injuries resulting in visits to emergency rooms.”

As of July this year, nine Albertans have died due to tragic, preventable work-related farm incidents. Most of those deaths involved machinery. During harvest time, farmers operate large machinery day and night until the harvest is complete. Historically, the highest number of farm related injuries and fatalities occur in the fall.

“Achieving the goal of an injury-free harvest season will require advance planning, great management skills and a personal commitment to safety by each person working on the farm,” says Aitken. “It’s a very worthwhile challenge. The payoff will be incredible – safe, healthy family members and farm employees who will be ready to celebrate the injury-free centennial harvest.”

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City Farm Edmonton – a first

A new and exciting project is underway as Edmonton’s City Farm has already had an excellent start to its first summer. This first-in-Canada success story for Edmonton had already completed two very successful pilot days as the team geared up for more fun-filled activity days in September.

City Farm Edmonton is a place where children, youth, families, educators and students can learn more about urban-rural environments and their interrelated relationships with plants and animals, and the importance of the seasons. Its aim is to help children, young people and adults co-operate in a wide range of activities. This includes exchanging ideas and experiences, taking part in workshops as well as learning new skills through both directed and spontaneous experiences that are centered around the land, growing food, animals, the natural world and each other.

“Imagine a city farm; children growing food, raising animals and discovering wildlife thriving in a natural habitat,” says Susan Penstone, project manager, City Farm Edmonton. “City Farm Edmonton is situated in the heart of a unique ecosystem and highly productive agricultural area demonstrating Alberta’s cultural heritage and preserving it for future generations.”

City Farm Edmonton is a community project of the Personal Community Support Association, a charitable organization; and a coalition including Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, the Agriculture Education Network, the City of Edmonton, Environment Canada, Legacy Lands, Riverbend Gardens, and Voices of the Soil. It is situated in the agricultural community of northeast Edmonton at Riverbend Gardens.

Those interested in being part of the City Farm Edmonton opportunity can call (780) 221-1128 for more information.

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Kernels of caution

Harvest can be an especially busy and dangerous time on the farm. Good weather and daylight hours are at a premium when trying to gather nature’s bounty in top condition. Planned pre-harvest maintenance and skilled equipment operation can minimize downtime and reduce potential for mishaps during harvest.

The most severe farm tragedies often involve machinery. Missing guards and shields, failure to recognize hazards, and careless operation are common factors in a majority of farm equipment-related injuries.

Safe completion of any task depends on knowledge, alertness and hazard awareness. Here are a few tips that will help make harvest season a safe one for the entire family:

- carry out pre-season maintenance and repair several weeks before harvest
- clear plugged equipment only after the power is turned off
- secure all guards and shields before equipment is started
- ensure all equipment is marked properly for road transportation, including a slow moving vehicle (SMV) sign
- wear comfortable close-fitting clothing, including sturdy, protective shoes
- keep children away from machinery; too many tragedies occur when youngsters end up in the path of equipment and where the operator’s view is restricted
- always let someone else know where workers are and have them check in regularly
- avoid sleep deprivation and extreme physical exhaustion
- avoid drugs or alcohol; these substances can impede safety

Working long hours during harvest can also contribute to farm injuries. Fatigue, drowsiness, and illness frequently contribute to mishaps in the field. Periodic rest breaks work. Even a 10- to 15-minute walk away from machinery every two to three hours is enough to regain the equilibrium the body needs to minimize the effects of vibration, noise and a fixed sitting position.

Sleep is as basic to survival as food and water. Losing as little as two hours of sleep can negatively affect alertness and performance. Sleep deprivation affects a person’s focus, concentration and ability to respond to an emergency. Symptoms can include: decreased judgment, decision-making and memory; slower reaction time; lack of concentration; fixation; and, worsened mood. Workers need to recognize when they have had enough and turn the operation over to someone else.

For further safety information and tips, visit the Farm Safety 4 Just Kids website at www.fs4jk.org.

Farm Safety 4 Just Kids is an organization dedicated to promoting a safe farm environment to prevent health hazards, injuries, and fatalities to children and youth. As well as representation all across the U.S., the organization has 11 chapters in Canada.

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Yellow-fleshed potatoes are good for your eyes

Dietary sources of lutein can be important to maintain eye health.

The most common cause of vision loss in the U.S. in people 50 years of age or older is age-related macular degeneration. Modern lifestyles, especially those that encourage a fast-food diet, have affected eating habits. As a result, many people may not be consuming sufficient amounts of lutein to maintain their eye health.

“Potatoes, especially yellow-fleshed potatoes, are rich in lutein,” says Dr. Michele Konschuh, potato research scientist with Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Brooks. “Eating one yellow-fleshed potato (7 oz.) could contribute up to 50 per cent of the lutein supplied by enriched multivitamins. The yellow-fleshed potatoes, bred through classical breeding programs for taste and flesh color, are more common in Europe.”

A recently completed project led by Konschuh screened 20 Alberta grown yellow-fleshed potato cultivars and identified five promising fresh market cultivars and five promising processing cultivars. The study showed that while freshly harvested potatoes contain the most lutein, cooking or frying did not reduce the lutein content. This research will continue for an additional two years to confirm initial findings and explore the effects of storage time and conditions on lutein content. Agriculture and Food Council, Alberta Agriculture, Potato Growers of Alberta, The Little Potato Company, Solanum International, Parkland Seed Potatoes HZPC Americas, Con-Agra Foods and Edmonton Potato Growers are sponsors of this project.

With this research information, bags of yellow-fleshed potatoes in grocery stores or farmers’ markets could have a nutritional label to let shoppers know the health benefits of eating this cultivar. While the low-carb craze reduced the per capita consumption of potatoes in North America, positioning potatoes as a functional food just might encourage the re-emergence of the potato in its yellow form as a diet staple.

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Lakeland College sheep leading, not following

The Vermilion campus of Lakeland College hosted an open house on August 31, 2005 for the sheep industry. The event was held to celebrate the launch of an applied research project that’s garnering interest right across Canada.

The rams being used in this research project are from five different terminal sire breeds, donated by purebred breeders as far away as Ontario. Their lambs will be evaluated over the next two years for carcass traits with the highest market value.

“The lamb business is very competitive, and we need to take lessons from New Zealand farmers about consistency,” says Sue Hosford, project manager and business development specialist with Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Camrose. “Alberta lamb has to compete with New Zealand lamb in the supermarket, so we have to take lessons from them about product consistency. Data from this project will help Alberta producers build better lambs by using the right type of ram on their own flock.”

“We all need good information to make good decisions, to grow our business,” says Miles Kliner, general manager at Sunterra Meats, Innisfail, the largest federal lamb processor in Canada and one of the major sponsors of the Lakeland project. The company is scrambling to meet the demand for premium quality domestic lamb. “Increasing the supply of high-value lambs will benefit the entire industry,” adds Kliner.

The sheep breeders who donated top quality rams for the research, and the contributions of the stakeholders working behind the scenes to get this project started, are acknowledged and appreciated.

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**Screen saver – a great farm safety reminder**

As part of the activities planned for the National Farm Safety Week held in March 2005, students in grades 4, 5 and 6 were invited to create their own positive safety message for rural Alberta communities and submit their posters to the Heritage Ag Society for judging.

The response was incredible and 491 posters poured in from 26 different schools across Alberta. Posters were on display at the J.G. O’Donoghue building during March and the winners were listed on Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development’s website, Ropin the Web, www.agric.gov.ab.ca. The top 40 posters have also been made into a Farm Safety Poster Contest Screen Saver that can be downloaded onto any computer. Interested persons can go to www.agric.gov.ab.ca/farmsafety to download the screen saver and enjoy viewing farm safety through the eyes of grade 4 to 6 students from across rural Alberta. “The posters were so popular among staff and visitors to the J.G. O’Donoghue building that we decided we had to get them out to a wider audience. The screen saver makes them available to anyone with a computer,” says Raelyn Peterson, training project coordinator for ag education and training branch. Viewers will be impressed by the amazing artwork of children aged 9 to 12 years and by the clarity, humour and effectiveness of the messages. The screen saver is entertaining, and at the same time, a good safety reminder to adults as well as kids.

**Innovative pork production nominations requested**

The Banff Pork Seminar 2006 committee is seeking nominations for the Dr. F.X. Aherne Prize for Innovative Pork Production. Three innovators will be honoured at the Banff Pork Seminar in January 2006. Nominations for this competition are open to innovations in any aspect of the business:

- product development
- product modification
- equipment development or modification
- improved productivity or profitability
- improved working conditions for staff
- improved animal well-being
- reduction of environmental impact
- improved pork meat quality and safety

Western Canadian pork producers, including owners, production managers, herds people or their consultants and suppliers all qualify. The three Dr. F.X. Aherne Prize for Innovative Pork Production winners will each receive two free registrations for the 35th anniversary of the Banff Pork Seminar being held at the Banff Centre on January 17 to 20, 2006. The prize package for each of the three winners includes accommodation for two, meals and up to $800 reimbursement for travel expenses. Applications must be made by **October 28, 2005**. For further information or an application form, call (780) 492-3651, e-mail info@banffpork.ca, or visit the seminar website at www.banffpork.ca.