Explore Local funds local learning

Agricultural educational programs are alive and well at Explore Local.

In 2010-2011 Explore Local funded 14 different activities. For the 2011-2012 fiscal year, funding has already been designated for a variety of activities including:

**Video Clip Project**
Explore Local is currently developing a series of videos to be posted online at the Explore Local website and on YouTube. The videos will also be made available to Agriculture and Rural Development staff for use in client presentations and workshops.

The focus of the videos will be customer service, providing insight into staffing and staff training, finding and working with staff both on-site and remotely, and providing exceptional customer service for on-farm experiences and on-line customer service.

**Food Hub Opportunity**
A food hub is defined as a centrally located facility which stores, markets and distributes locally produced food — like a farmers’ market for example — but there are a variety of food hub models out there. The internet has introduced us all to the ease of online shopping, and internet-based cooperative farmers’ markets are another example.

Whatever the model, food hubs offer the opportunity to attract new producers and expand the sale of locally grown food to a wider audience. Explore Local is creating awareness of food hubs through partnerships.

To better introduce the concept of food hubs, information sessions are planned for Edmonton and Calgary in late November.

*Introduction to Food Hubs* will be an opportunity to learn more about this emerging business model. The workshop features renowned speaker Anthony Flaccavento, who will share his knowledge and expertise of food hubs in the USA.

**Explore/Expand Local Foods, Local Markets Workshops**
Explore Local will continue with its popular Explore/Expand workshop series in the upcoming year. Many of these workshops are conducted in partnership with counties.

The “Explore” workshops target individuals who are new to the local market scene, providing them with introductory information on marketing channel options and regulatory information. Local market operators are also on hand to tell their stories and inspire participants.

The “Expand” workshops target those individuals who are already selling into at least one local market channel and are considering expanding their operations. More in-depth information is provided on specific marketing channels and local market opportunities. These workshops focus heavily on producer stories and give participants a chance to learn more through roundtable sessions.

For further information on Explore Local initiatives, visit our website or watch for updates in future issues of Field Notes.
Down on the farm

Eat local. That phrase has caused an explosion in direct market farming (growing and selling your crop directly to the consumer) and many Alberta farmers are interested in learning more about this burgeoning industry.

That’s why Rob Spencer, Commercial Horticulture Production Specialist with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development is doing his part to help them. Every year, in conjunction with Alberta Farm Fresh Producers Association (AFFPA), Rob organizes tours of direct market farms across the province.

If you’re trying to break into direct marketing, change your farming focus, or expand an existing crop, touring a successful operation is a great way to learn the ropes.

“Usually the group is a 50/50 mix of existing and potential farmers,” says Rob, “but anyone who’s interested is welcome, you don’t have to be a member of AFFPA.”

The tours are casual, half-day affairs, with tour-goers arriving around noon at the first farm on the list. After a quick lunch and tour, everyone sets off to the next farm in their own pickup — no tour buses and megaphones here.

“We can usually visit two to three farms in an afternoon,” says Rob, “and we have at least 30 people per tour, the largest group so far was 60 people.”

At the farm, you’re taken on a guided tour by the people who know it best — the owners and farm hands who work the fields and tend the crops.

Tour-goers visit a variety of operations from small to large, and see first hand the differences in operational scale, farming techniques and marketing styles.

In Alberta, direct market farms vary from small producers to large-scale operations, everything from restaurant suppliers and u-pick orchards to large-field vegetable and fruit growers.

Left: the tour group watches a demonstration of one of several different transplanting machines at The Blooming Fields, Didsbury, June 2009. Right: a black raspberry plant at CR Fruit Farm near Lethbridge, August 2011.
The tours highlight the production end of farming, but Rob adds variety with specific themes... or focus areas. "We did an equipment focused tour last year. We went from a farm where existing equipment was home-modified to get the job done, and then to another where they had specialty equipment."

A water-use tour was also conducted in the Wetaskiwin area last year, focusing on irrigation and the legal use of water.

In the past, tours have been conducted in the areas of Innisfail/Didsbury, Edmonton/St. Albert, Vimy/Bon Accord, Strathmore, Wetaskiwin and Lethbridge.

The 2012 conference is tentatively scheduled for March 1-2, 2012 in Red Deer. Further information and registration forms will be available at AFFPA’s website: www.albertafarmfresh.com.

Next year, Rob is planning tours in the Peace and Central Alberta areas. He is hoping to conduct a tour of the demonstration orchard at Olds College and perhaps tie that in with another topic that people are expressing interest in: CSA (Community Shared Agriculture) farms.

“More and more CSAs are popping up in the province, we visited one in the Lethbridge area in August and I’d like to visit more,” he says.

If you're interested in attending one of Rob's tours you can contact him at Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development: Alberta toll free 310-FARM (3276) or robert.spencer@gov.ab.ca.
Upcoming Events

Understanding the Allergic Consumer: A Needfinding Workshop
October 18, Calgary
A one-day, hands-on workshop for Alberta food processors to better understand the world of the allergic consumer (wheat gluten and nut allergies).

This workshop enables Alberta food processors to gain a thorough understanding of “free from” foods to reduce uncertainty about target markets. Call Cherril Guennewig at 780-422-2004 to register.

Social Media Marketing Training
October 18, Olds
October 26, Edmonton
This one-day session has been developed to help producers, processors, and value chain partners understand the fundamentals of how search engines work and how to leverage social media to build and promote your business. Instructor David West will provide compelling reasons why companies should be present in social media circles such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Blogs. This will be a hands-on learning environment and each participant will have the offer to sign-up for a one-on-one analysis session with David. Registration is $75 and includes a workbook, lunch and an offer for a one-on-one analysis session; a deal valued at more than $200 per person. Space is limited and a maximum of two people per company. For more information contact Margurite Thiessen at 780-968-3513.

Selling to Target
November 16, Edmonton
Target announced, in one of the largest retail news events of the decade, it will be opening in Canada in early 2013. Target has strongly hinted they will include perishable food products. Join us and a former Target executive for ‘Selling to Target,’ a free one-day seminar. For more information, contact Darcy Peters at 780-638-4756.

Advance your skills

Are you interested in taking a course to advance your leadership skills in the agriculture industry? If so, check out Growing Forward’s Leadership Development Grant.

This grant aims to help individuals seeking leadership training to benefit the agriculture industry. Eligible applicants include primary producers, executive directors or directors representing industry organizations, producer groups, processors or ag-tourism businesses, or a leadership program developer. Some eligible training includes team building, facilitation, strategic thinking, board governance, and coaching/mentoring.

The grant covers 75 per cent of registration fees for approved training, including a daily travel allowance, if applicable, to a maximum of $12,000. Those who are interested in more specific information or would like to apply can visit www.growingforward.alberta.ca or call 310-FARM (3276).

It’s the law!

A regular Field Notes feature highlighting government regulations which may affect your local market business.

The Canada Agricultural Products Act regulates the marketing of agricultural products for import, export and interprovincial trade. For all interprovincial sales, food establishments must be inspected and approved by the CFIA under the appropriate regulation of the Canada Agricultural Products Act.

For more information about this and other government regulations that may affect you, visit the Resources section at www.explorealocal.ca.

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Field Notes is published four times per year and is available online at www.explorealocal.ca. For further information about anything you’ve read here, or to be included on our email list, please contact Lisa Sharp at lisa.sharp@gov.ab.ca.