

Renewal Now!

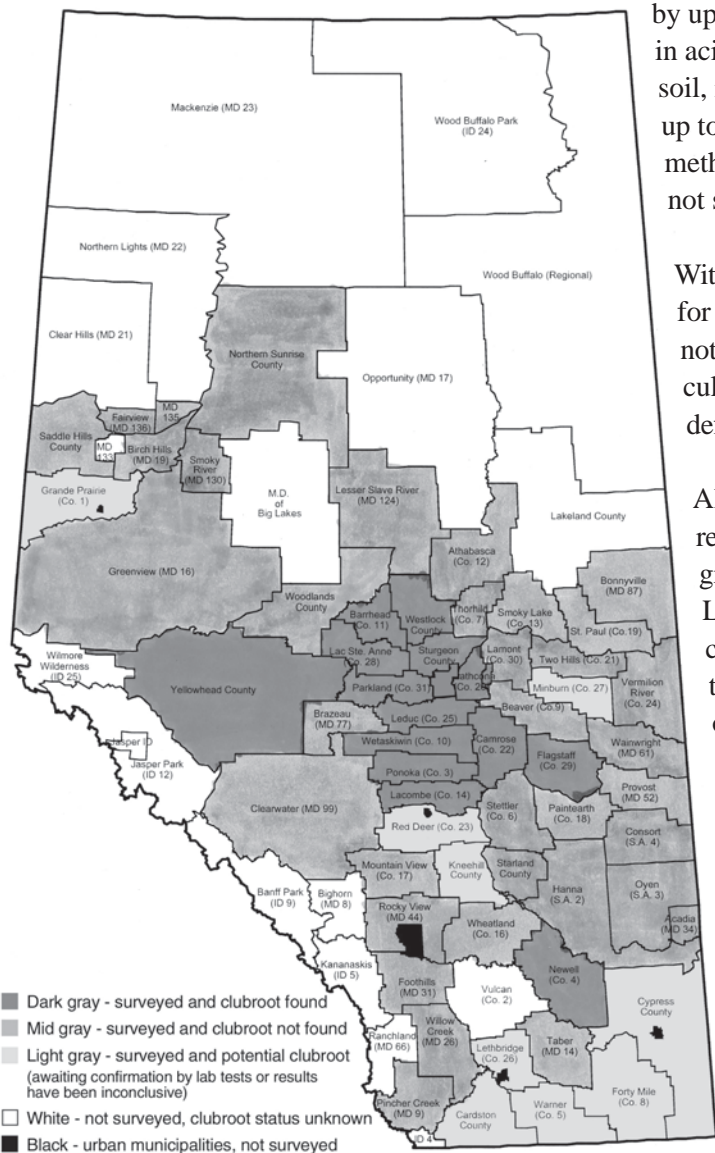
Business ideas, information and programs for exploring opportunities in agriculture. **Winter 2009**

New tools for managing clubroot

This soil-borne canola disease is spreading. Strategies to control it are on the way. Still, growers are advised to be vigilant.

There's good news and bad news for Alberta producers when it comes to clubroot in canola. The bad news is, a 2008 field survey found this destructive canola disease in 18 Alberta counties, six more than in 2007.

The good news is, a host of counter-measures by governments, canola growers and plant breeders are beginning to show progress.



“Clubroot continues to be a very serious disease from the standpoint of how it spreads and its longevity in the soil,” says Murray Hartman, Lacombe-based Oilseed Specialist with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development.

Clubroot has been known in Europe for more than a century, mainly for its damaging impact to brassica crops like cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower. Clubroot, which can reduce canola yields by up to 50%, thrives under moist conditions and in acid soils. This disease is mainly spread by soil, in which clubroot spores are able to live for up to two decades, once introduced. Other methods of transmission are documented, but are not significant.

With no fungicides registered for use on canola for clubroot in Canada, and resistant varieties not yet commercially available, that leaves cultural practices as farmers' most viable line of defence (see sidebar).

Alberta's Clubroot Management Committee – representing governments, scientists, canola growers and the Canola Council – met in Lacombe this past October 16 to review the current clubroot situation. While results from the 2008 field survey were a clear concern, other news provided cause for optimism.

“Right now, the energy companies are doing a good job of keeping their equipment clean,” says Hartman, “though generally, farmers could be doing much better. There are also eight or nine clubroot management research projects that are currently underway or are about to begin. Researchers are making good progress on resistant varieties. Some clubroot-resistant canola seed could be available in 2009 or 2010.”

6 steps to prevent or contain clubroot

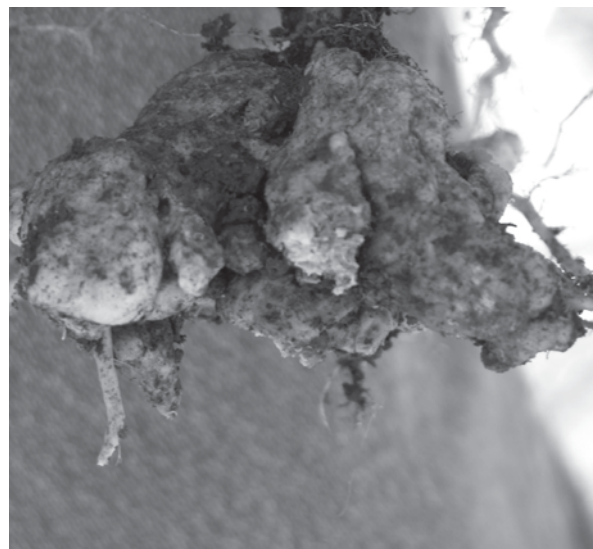
Clubroot, while serious, is still not widespread in Alberta canola fields. To help keep it that way, producers are advised to follow these management recommendations.

1. Use long rotations, growing canola only every four years or more in the same field. Although this practice will not prevent the introduction of clubroot to clean fields, it will restrict disease development within the field and likely avert a severe infestation.
2. Practice good sanitation to restrict the movement of possibly contaminated material. (This will help reduce the spread of other diseases, weeds and insects, too.) Resting clubroot spores are most likely to spread via contaminated soil and infected canola plant parts. Producers should follow the practice of cleaning soil and crop debris from field equipment before entering or leaving all fields. The equipment cleaning procedure involves knocking or scraping off soil lumps and sweeping off loose soil.
3. Use direct seeding and other soil conservation practices to reduce erosion. Resting spores move readily in soil transported by wind or water erosion and by overland flow.
4. During the growing season, scout canola fields regularly and carefully. Identify causes of wilting, stunting, yellowing and premature ripening – do not assume anything.
5. Avoid the use of straw bales and manure from infested or suspicious areas. Clubroot spores are reported to survive through the digestive tracts of livestock.
6. Avoid common untreated seed (including canola, cereals and pulses). The risk of spreading clubroot by contaminated seed or straw is much less than by the transportation of contaminated field equipment. Nonetheless, Earth-tag on seed from infested fields could introduce resting spores to clean fields. Certain seed treatment fungicides may control spores on contaminated seed, but this observation needs further research to confirm its validity.

Source: Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development

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Clubroot in canola. This destructive canola disease was found in 18 Alberta counties in 2008.

Local Market Expansion: programs offer support and mentoring for rural entrepreneurs

From networking to distribution to food safety, these initiatives bring producers vital business resources.



What does it take to market a new food product successfully? If the business is located in rural Alberta, the entrepreneur who is behind it will likely face a variety of challenges.

One possible issue is finding peers to learn from and exchange ideas with. Another relates to the economics of moving food products to larger centres that could be hundreds of kilometres away.

Finally, the rural entrepreneur must contend with a range of technical issues around food production, such as establishing protocols for food safety.

“These producers have local markets they can and do serve,” says Karen Goad, Farm Direct Marketing Specialist with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development in Grande Prairie. “In some cases, however, these local markets alone aren’t enough to

support such an enterprise. So producers naturally look to larger markets.”

Today, a new generation of programs is making it easier to bring value-added products to market. In this section of *Renewal Now*, we look inside **three initiatives** funded through the Agricultural Policy Framework, a federal-provincial-territorial initiative, that are having a real impact on the fortunes of rural agri-food entrepreneurs.

Rural networks exchange ideas, share inspiration

When you’re trying something new, it helps to be able to speak to someone who has done it before. That, in a nutshell, is the idea behind two networks linking rural businesses having the shared objective of building viable agriculture- and food-related enterprises.

Established and nurtured with Agricultural Policy Framework funding, the Learn Agri-Food Network based in the Peace Region and the Country Roads Network centred in Camrose have become popular with dozens of growing businesses.

“We think of these groups as the Chamber of Commerce for rural entrepreneurs,” says Goad. “Learn Agri-Food and Country Roads use a number of strategies, such as meetings, extension activities and media promotion to link their members with services and information on production, marketing and many other issues.”

The networks typically hold two-hour meetings up to five times per year. Elaine Stenbraaten, an Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development New Venture Business Specialist in Fairview has taken part in a number of gatherings of the Learn Agri-Food network in the Peace Region. She has noticed that once a member introduces a topic of concern, the rest quickly recognize common ground and begin to discuss the best approach to deal with it.

“Some people have specialized knowledge that others can benefit from,” says Stenbraaten. “Someone might ask, for example, how to price a product. Someone else might want to know the best way to design a retail sign. There are often questions about packaging. When you’re working alone, these kinds of logistical issues can be a real barrier to success and the meetings help people get past them.”

While the two networks have much in common, there are also differences between them, partly determined by market proximity. Members of the



Camrose group do most of their selling in the greater Edmonton area. The Peace Region group, having a smaller local market, tends to sell throughout a wider swath of territory. In some cases from the Peace Region to as far south as Calgary.

Stenbraaten is often impressed by the willingness of rural entrepreneurs to share what they know. At one meeting, a member asked how to determine the nutritional composition of a food product, vital information that’s seen on every food label. It turns out another member had recently purchased a nutritional analysis software program. This meant others in the group could take advantage of the member’s research and product evaluation before purchasing their own program.

The networks also help people build their own team of advisors, with bookkeeping services, lawyers and insurance brokers being frequently recommended from member to member.

If you’re marketing farm-made jam, and someone down the road is marketing farm-packaged honey, aren’t the two of you competitors? Wouldn’t it be wiser to hoard your hard-won knowledge, rather than giving the other guy a leg up?

Cindy Cuthbert, Grande Prairie-based Project Coordinator with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, reports that network members don’t see it that way. They’ve generously taken the view that, by openly sharing important information, everyone ultimately comes out ahead.

“One of the benefits of both networks is the connection that these rural agripreneurs make with each other, not as business partners, but as allies who support each other,” says Cuthbert.



Initiative 1

Need a lift? I'm going there, too.

Initiative 2

What's a good way for startup businesses to get bigger? One way is to observe what big businesses do and adapt these strategies on a smaller scale. That's how Learn Agri-Food Network members put their heads together to solve one of their members' most pressing issues: distribution.

According to Karen Goad, the story began in Edmonton with an informal club made up of Chief Executive Officers of agri-food companies. The more this group of 12 CEOs met, the more they noticed how many issues they had in common. Example? Boxes.

"These companies all needed corrugated cardboard boxes for their products," says Goad. "But when they compared the prices they were each paying, the prices were all over the map. They decided to pool their orders to get a better price for everyone."

If this pull-together strategy was good enough for big-city CEOs, could it work for small rural-based businesses? Goad and her team decided to find out. They asked Learn Agri-Food members which operational issues were keeping them up at night. One commonly felt headache – the difficulty of finding reliable, cost-effective shipping seemed like the best option for shared action.

For these businesses, distribution flowed in two directions. A variety of supplies from jars to labels to ingredients were shipped from larger centres to the businesses. A variety of packaged food products were then shipped from rural businesses to market.

"We looked at a number of options," says Goad. "The incoming shipments were coming at different times from different places, but lots of the outgoing shipments were going to places like Stony Plain, Edmonton and Calgary. We saw an opportunity to



Cindy, Ian and Corinna Prins of Pik-n-Pak Produce unloading truck at Bentley Farmers' Market.

aggregate shipments. Now, five members are consolidating their shipments to common markets."

The higher the volume of goods being shipped, the better deal a trucking company is likely to offer. With small-volume customers like these, some trucking companies just weren't interested. Multiply the volume by five, even if the shipment is only two pallets, and commit to a regular schedule and truckers start to see it's worth their while.

"This strategy has allowed these agripreneurs to get their products to Edmonton and Calgary more cost-effectively," adds Stenbraaten. "In order to make consolidated shipping work, you need a critical mass. We now have that for outbound shipments. Once we get a critical mass for inbound, we know it can work, and that it can make a real difference to these rural businesses."

Program highlights Best Practices for food safety

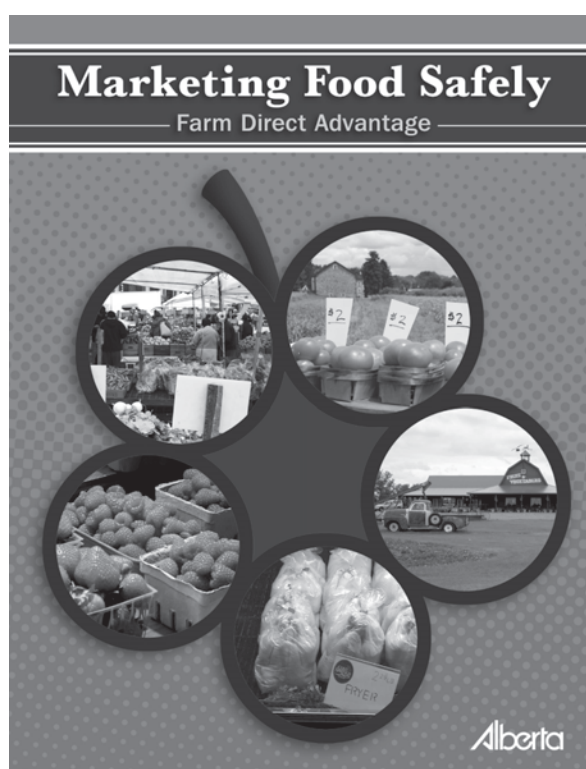
Initiative 3

If ever there was a year when public confidence in food safety was tested, 2008 had to be it.

"Consumers *assume* that food is safe and meets the same standards regardless where they purchase it from," says Karen Goad. "Our objective is to work with farm-direct marketers to make sure that assumption continues to be valid."

Goad and other Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development (ARD) staff, working closely with Alberta Health, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and industry partners, have developed a number of food safety resources for farm-direct marketers and agricultural tourism businesses. While food safety is sometimes equated with a set of regulations, it is better described as a set of logical, well-grounded principles and best practices that a business follows to produce safe food.

In 2007, ARD, in partnership with the Alberta Farmers' Market Association, published and distributed *Marketing Food Safely*. According to Goad, this resource allows farm-direct marketers to



learn more about the food safety issues most relevant to the marketing aspect of their businesses.

"This is an interactive resource, based on the premise that effective food safety plans are built on a solid foundation of prerequisite programs," she says. "People can work through the resource at their own

pace and cover a range of issues or focus on the appropriate chapters to address their current concerns."

Marketing Food Safely offers detailed information on 'best practices' relating to premises, sanitation, storage, transportation, equipment, personal hygiene, pest control and recall, as well as other topics. The resource can be purchased through the Alberta Farmers' Market Association. Visit www.albertamarkets.com/members or call 1-780-427-6403.

More food safety information is available in a growing series of fact sheets, the first of which is called *Farm Direct Sales: Know the Regulations*. Visit www.agriculture.alberta.ca and search **FARM DIRECT SALES**.

While food safety issues will vary according to the nature of the product, Goad identifies two factors that all producer-processors must come to grips with.

"Producers have to perform their due diligence in terms of record keeping, so if a lapse in food safety should occur, the product could easily be recalled," she says. "The second key issue is to have a set of standard operating procedures that are the basis for ongoing staff training."

Opportunity knocks for organic producers

Normally, the laws of supply and demand do a pretty fair job of regulating agricultural production. When demand rises, farmers produce more supply. When demand falls, farmers take the hint and produce less.

For years, however, one element of agricultural production has consistently seen greater demand than available supply. Alberta's 350 organic producers – who grow everything from grains to dairy to beef to vegetables – can't begin to approach the level of demand for their products. In fact, 80% of organic food products in Alberta stores are imported from other countries.

According to Keri Sharpe, Business Development Specialist with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development in Stony Plain, much more organic production is needed.

"In 2006, sales of organic food products in Alberta rose 44% from the previous year," says Sharpe. "Organic production didn't increase anywhere near 44%, so there's a widening gap between the volume of organic products consumers want to buy and what's produced here in Alberta. We won't begin to close the demand-supply gap until we produce more."

What consumers are thinking

Twenty years ago, organic food products were almost the exclusive domain of specialized "health food" stores. For today's Alberta consumers, organic products are as close as the nearest Safeway, Superstore or farmers' market. The buyer is no longer the 'hippie' of ancient stereotype, but middle-class rural, urban and suburban families. What does the extra cost of organic buy them?

"Perceptions about health issues are a big driver for many consumers," says Sharpe. "As well, people's concern about where their food comes from is playing well for producers. There are also a segment of consumers who believe we have to



4 Organic vegetables meet two consumer needs: local and organic.

Alberta's 350 organic producers can't meet the growing demand. Here's what prospective new entrants need to know.



Seven Alberta dairies are moving to organic production as part of an Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development and Alberta Milk Producers' initiative.

do more to promote the environmental sustainability of farming, and they see organic playing a role in this."

While Sharpe sees a need for greater organic production overall, market demand and barriers to entry vary by sector. Here's how she breaks down some key opportunities.

Grain. "This is an everyday organic product, and there's a huge market for it," says Sharpe. "Organic grains go everywhere: the U.S. first and then Europe – especially to Switzerland. If we could convince artisan bakers and small-scale processors in Alberta to use more organic ingredients, the demand would increase even more."

Vegetables. Sharpe sees Alberta-grown vegetables as a viable way to address two distinct, yet complementary, consumer desires: organic and local. Farm-based retailing and farmers' markets provide important channels for sales.

Beef. You'll find organic and natural Alberta beef on restaurant menus all over the place. The tricky part for potential new entrants is processing. Even though demand is increasing and many beef producers could help meet it, there are very few processors that can handle the small volume of product coming from the organic beef sector.

Milk. Sharpe sees growing demand for organic milk and other dairy products. Supply management regulations have not stopped the conversion from conventional to organic production. However, the domestic market will be key. Unlike many other organic products, Canadian milk cannot be exported, which restricts sales opportunities.

As Sharpe considers the growing market demand for organic foods and the ability of Alberta producers to supply it, she's confident today's current organic producers will be joined by many new entrants in the years to come.

"Organic products aren't any different than other agriculture products," she says. "We know we can produce it. The key thing is marketing. If we know the market and truly believe in what we're producing, we can go a long way."

Programs and initiatives that help pave the way

A range of programs developed by Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development (ARD) – many of which receive funding from the Agricultural Policy Framework, a federal-provincial-territorial initiative, are laying the groundwork for the growth of organic production in the province.

As Sharpe explains, one such initiative is the Organic Harmonization Project. "This project brings a number of different groups together to set the direction the industry wants to go with research, marketing and more," she says. "When we have 350 producers pulling in the same direction, we can get a lot done."

Another key initiative for Sharpe and her team is the transition of seven Alberta dairies to organic production. This three-year process, strongly supported by a working group of ARD and the Alberta Milk Producers, will bring up to five million litres annually of organic milk production on stream.

ARD also supports research related to organic production by providing Alberta's share of funding to the National Organic Research Centre in Truro, Nova Scotia. The Centre's work will make an important contribution to the long-term success of Canada's 3,000 to 4,000 organic producers.

Alberta is also participating in a shared initiative among the three Prairie provinces to develop a technical transition manual and mentorship program for producers who want to make the transition to organics.

"There are many opportunities for organic production," says Sharpe, "but a lot comes down to getting the information transfer right. Government and industry have a role to play in getting helpful, timely information to producers so they can make informed decisions."

For more information on opportunities in organic agriculture, visit www.goingorganic.ca or contact ARD's Keri Sharpe at (780) 968-6556 or e-mail keri.sharpe@gov.ab.ca.

Life is getting easier for organic adopters

As Steven Snider wraps up his 22nd organic crop, his advice will inspire those who want to follow a similar path.

Alberta farmers and ranchers have good reasons to consider a move to organic production: new markets, potentially premium prices and perhaps, the chance to build a consumer-facing brand.

When the Snider family farm near New Norway made the switch in 1986, their motivations were quite different.

“We didn’t go in it for the money because there was no extra money in it then,” says Snider, Alberta’s 2003 Outstanding Young Farmer of the Year. “It was more of a lifestyle choice. I hated handling all those herbicide products, and I had herbicide poisoning when I was younger. My father, Robert, always grew organic wheat, though it wasn’t certified, that we used to mill on the farm.”

Snider and his family, operating as Little Red Hen Mills, grow 2,000 acres of certified organic cereals, green manure crops and hay. Getting to this point, along with recognition as one of the guiding lights of organic production in Alberta, came with several setbacks. Despite the challenges of growing and marketing crops under a radically different production system, the Sniders never lost faith that they were doing the right thing for both business and family.

Resources are better today

Take it from Snider: if going organic seems daunting in 2008, it was positively scary in 1986.

“There was very little information available at the time,” he remembers, “which led us to go out and talk to people. Now, there are a lot of publications, more producers you can talk to and conferences and websites to visit.”



Steven Snider maintains that organic grain production is in the early innings of a long-term success story.

Being well-known as an organic producer comes with a price. For Snider, that price is a telephone that seldom stops ringing. He is accustomed to providing expert (not to mention free) advice to fellow farmers looking for his views on the pros and cons of organic production. “I know how frustrating it was for my dad and me to learn,” he

says, “and I hope we can save others from making the mistakes we made.”

As challenging as the production side can be, that might not be the biggest hurdle that organic newcomers face. For many, it’s marketing. When Snider was just getting started, his goal was to market more and more of his crop as organic, and less and less as an undifferentiated commodity. That took time. In 1986, he sold just five per cent as organic. By 2008, virtually his entire production sold as organic.

“There are so many more marketing options for organic production today,” says Snider. “For instance, you can contract production now. The risks around marketing are not as bad as they used to be, but you can still make some mistakes with marketing that can cost you money.”

The future looks bright

At first blush, it might seem odd that Snider spends so much time advising producers on how to gain a competitive advantage which took him decades to acquire. He doesn’t see it as educating future competitors, but as nurturing future leaders and builders of an industry he believes in. Snider maintains that organic grain production is in the early innings of a long-term success story.

“We see continued opportunity if we just open our eyes and look around,” he says. “Years ago, people thought organic agriculture was just a fad. Well, we’ve proven that we’re here to stay.”

Alberta Farm Safety Program to offer pilot safety training course

Are you interested in safety training for you and others on your farm?

Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development’s Alberta Farm Safety Program, supported by the Agricultural Policy Framework a federal-provincial-territorial initiative, will be piloting a safety training course for farmers starting early 2009. The course is developed around six critical thinking questions to help you identify and avoid potential hazards on your farm to prevent injury and reduce lost time incidents. Would you like to take part in the pilot course? Watch our website for details in the New Year: www.agriculture.alberta.ca/farmsafety.

Accelerate your business: here's how



Donald Cooper says clarity is key for success in any business.

Every once in awhile you come across an experience that changes how you see your business. It challenges you to see old issues in new ways. It demands that you seek fresh solutions to long-standing concerns.

For Jim Cooper, Commercialization Manager with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development in Camrose, a one-day management seminar held in Calgary and Edmonton this fall had that kind of back-to-basics impact. The seminar, *Accelerate Your Business*, was delivered by Donald Cooper (no relation to Jim), a management consultant with a challenging but inspiring idea.

“Being in agriculture, especially as producers, we spend a lot of time thinking about our product,” says Jim Cooper. “Donald brought the message that it’s not just about the product, but about the commitments we deliver to our customers and our employees. It was a powerful, relevant message and very timely for agriculture.”

Clarity comes first

At age 67, Donald Cooper has been-there-done-that in the world of business. For 20 years, he was part of family-owned sporting goods icon Cooper Canada. For 13 years, he owned and managed a retail chain. Since 1991, Cooper has shared his knowledge of marketing and strategic planning as a speaker and consultant.

One of his core topics is the role of leadership within organizations. He believes the first duty of a manager or leader – regardless of the size of the company – is to provide clarity of an organization’s purpose.

Cooper wants organizations to be clear, above all, about their commitments. He views commitments as being entirely different from goals and objectives. While goals and objectives are about desired outcomes, commitments are about personal and shared responsibility.

“What are we committed to *be* as an organization?” Cooper asks. “What are we committed to *do*, today and over the next three to five years? What are we committed to *deliver*, to our customers and our employees? We want our employees to be committed to us, but how much time do we spend on our commitments to them?”

Young people today!

For many farm businesses, finding good employees is getting harder and harder. Cooper sympathizes, but questions how many businesses truly understand what today’s young employees are looking for.

A generation or two ago, a company’s commitments were organized rather differently. Companies were committed to write paycheques on time and employees were committed to do what they were told.

“I grew up in a time when the boss said ‘jump,’ you asked, ‘how high?’” says Cooper. “That time is *gone*. Young people are now 10 times smarter than we were at their age. They bring so much to the table – and they *know* it. They won’t put up with any caveman-style management stuff.”

Beyond the product to the experience

Once managers understand the need for clarity and the nature of commitments, Cooper guides them through a process to create a commitment to a great future for the business.

“Most businesses define themselves in terms of what they sell,” says Cooper. “Whether it’s food, insurance, mortgages or cars, I ask people to redefine their business by how they help their target customers. What is the help that the

customer needs that we can deliver? How can we deliver this help in an extraordinary way?”

For Alberta farmers and ranchers, such questions might initially seem a bit too basic. What are the consumers needs that an Alberta-grown food product can help with? There’s the obvious: nutrition. Stick with it, though, and drill a bit deeper. Beyond the obvious, the answer might include more subjective elements like taste, value, variety, convenience, culture, or even entertainment. Suddenly, the question is taking the business away from bulk commodities that provide simple nutrition toward products that provide *experiences*.

In almost every audience to whom Cooper presents, there are skeptics. Typically, someone asks a question like, *This all sounds great, but does it work on the bottom line?*

Donald Cooper’s answer is an unqualified yes. After 50 years in business, there is one thing he knows for sure and it’s where he believes every business should begin.

“In business, there is an incredible waste of time and energy because of lack of clarity,” he says, “because employees have become disengaged, because the business doesn’t know where it’s going. It all starts with clarity of purpose and clarity of our commitments to customers and to employees. This works.”

As a management consultant, Donald Cooper charges up to \$10,000 per day. You can gain his invaluable insights for free. Visit www.donaldcooper.com, click on *Free Articles* and follow your interests. Cooper recommends article B9: *How to create an effective Vision Statement* – perfect for anyone looking to chart the future of their business.



Donald Cooper offers insight into how clear commitments motivate employees and give a business direction.

Safety Up!

New farm safety campaign takes a fresh message to rural youth.

Farm safety awareness has been an important issue in agricultural policy for decades. Despite the ongoing emphasis of the use of safety gear and safe practices on the farm, statistics on agricultural accidents suggest there's still much to be done.

"Safety is a tough sell," says Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development (ARD) Farm Safety Coordinator Laurel Aitken. "According to a survey carried out recently by Farm Credit Canada, there's a huge discrepancy between how safe we *think* we are and the actual statistics for farm-based accidents."

Aitken and an ARD communications team decided to take a different approach to spreading the word about the use of best practices for farm safety. The group wanted to aim their communications squarely at, arguably, the toughest audience to reach: people between the ages of 17 and 25.

Why is this generation a challenging group for awareness-building? One reason is their media habits are different than their parents. They overwhelmingly favour on-demand electronic media over, for example, a monthly magazine or weekly newspaper. Another reason, in Aitken's view, is the natural disinclination of youth to ponder their own mortality.

"It's human nature at that age," she says. "Young people tend to think they're invincible, which of course they're not, which is exactly why they can benefit from knowing more about farm safety. You just need to do it in a way that makes them less likely to tune out."

Not your parents' farm safety campaign

In 2008, ARD launched a new-look farm safety best practices campaign for youth and the farm businesses that employ them. Knowing that a theme that emphasized risk would likely miss the mark, Aitken's team chose a different path.

"We wanted to connect farm safety to the activities that are important to this group," she says. "That means recreation, music, hanging out with friends and sports."

The theme of the campaign is *Safety Up!*, a sentiment that's heard in two distinct ways. The first is that safety should be elevated to a higher level of importance. The second evokes the saying *cowboy up*, meaning to get with it and take some action.

Through a variety of media – radio ads, posters, a website and tradeshow displays – the 17-to-25 age group is asked to reflect on how a farm accident could keep them from doing what they love best.



People are shown pursuing recreational activities, being with friends and playing sports – good times that are only possible when you come home safe.

Funding from the Agricultural Policy Framework, a federal-provincial-territorial initiative, allowed Aitken to hire a summer student to take the *Safety Up!* message to rodeos, agriculture events and other activities that attract the 17-to-25 demographic. Response so far suggests that *Safety Up!* is hitting home with the target audience, who will be hearing this message during 2009 and beyond.

Agri-Preneur Scholarship recipients announced

Short of bringing a small army of marketing experts to your front door, the Agri-Preneur Scholarship program might be the next best thing.

Under the program, experienced Alberta farm-direct marketers and agri-tourism operators can receive up to \$1,000 in funding to pursue an educational opportunity that's relevant to their interests and their business. The learning experience can be an out-of-province, national or international event.

The \$1,000 scholarship can include funding for conference registrations, travel expenses or assistance with the cost of self-guided tours of farm-direct or agri-tourism points of interest. As well this year the scholarship program will award up to two scholarships to new entrants to agriculture to attend an Alberta-based event.

How to apply

To apply for an Agri-Preneur Scholarship, Alberta farm-direct marketers, agri-tourism operators and appropriate industry association staff or board members are asked to submit an application with information about their business, their planned activity and how scholarship funds will be used.

For eligibility and program rules, and to download an application, please visit www.exploredirect.ca. The next application deadline is January 30, 2009.



Larry and Susan King, Harmony's Way Farm, Crooked Creek.

"We focus on the marketing part of the business," says Lisa Sharp of Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development's Local /Domestic Market Expansion Branch in Camrose. "Marketing is usually the area where agri-preneurs would like to upgrade their knowledge. If the event is strictly about production, then it's outside what we can fund with the scholarship program."

Qualifying educational opportunities can be found year-round; the Agri-Preneur Scholarship program announces new recipients at five points during the year. The most recent class of scholarship recipients includes:

Esther Walker, GlenView Farm/Greenhouse, Camrose. This is an organic farm producing grass-finished lamb and organic free-range eggs, as well as operating a greenhouse. Walker was awarded a \$1,000 scholarship for a self-directed tour of greenhouses and orchards in British Columbia - September 2008.

Susan and Larry King, Harmony's Way Farm, Crooked Creek. These organic farm operators, focusing on cattle, sheep, hogs and laying hens, were awarded a \$1,000 scholarship for a self-directed tour in Terra Madre, Italy in October 2008.

Keri and Randy Graham, Edgar Farms, Innisfail. A \$1,000 scholarship allowed these fifth-generation producers, who grow vegetables and raise natural grass-fed Angus beef, to attend an industry conference in Ontario in November 2008.

Peter and Mary Lundgard, Nature's Way Farm, Grimshaw. The \$1,000 scholarship enabled these organic farmers of beef, lamb, alfalfa seed and bees to attend the Organic Connections 2008 Conference in Saskatoon in November 2008.

The Agri-Preneur Scholarship is delivered through Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development and funded through the Agricultural Policy Framework (APF), a federal-provincial-territorial initiative.

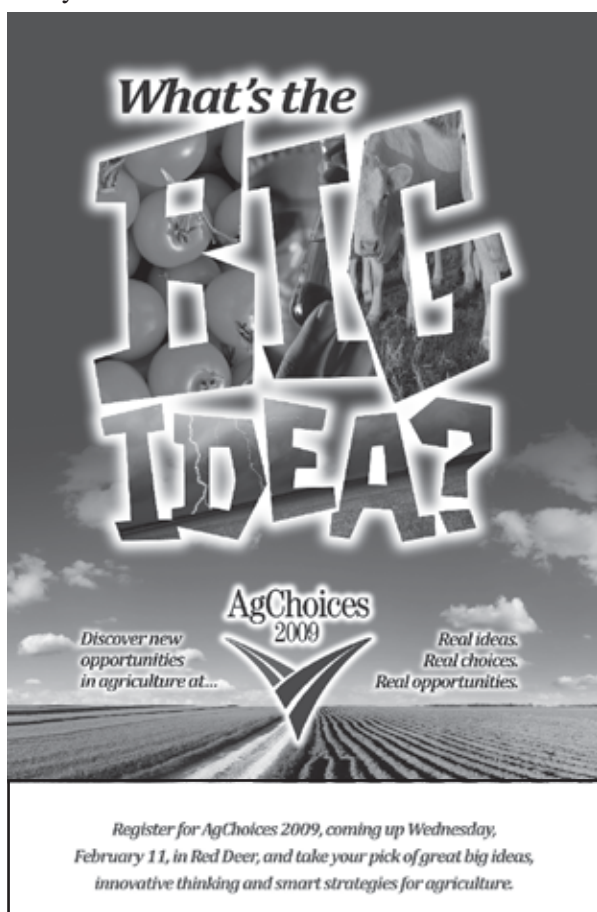


Keri and Randy Graham, Edgar Farms, Innisfail.

What's The Big Idea? You'll find it here

If you've attended past editions of the annual *AgChoices* conference, you'll want to know that the 2009 event will be the best yet. If you haven't, here's your opportunity to gain a global perspective on key opportunities and determine how your farm can meet them.

This one-day conference brings together some of the best thinking of industry experts and successful farmers, with practical information you can really use.



Don't miss AgChoices 2009, Wednesday, February 11 in Red Deer.

"Farmers and ranchers who attend *AgChoices 2009* will connect with big ideas and lots of them," says conference organizer Wendy McCormick, Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development. "We'll have global perspectives, grassroots farm perspectives, information on government initiatives and of course, networking with farmers from across Alberta."

AgChoices 2009 takes place on Wednesday, February 11, 2009, at the Capri Centre Hotel, Convention & Trade Centre in Red Deer.

Beginning with registration and coffee at 8 a.m., the conference kicks off with big-picture thinking presentations by international agribusiness veterans John Oliver and Art Froehlich. To close out the morning, a four-member panel of successful producers (Rod Bradshaw, Innisfail; Grant Hirsche, High River; Doug Livingston, Vermilion; and Leo Meyer, Manning) will share how they have captured opportunity in all kinds of markets.

Following a lunch buffet of Alberta-grown foods, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development George Groeneveld will share the Alberta Government's vision for ensuring a strong sustainable agriculture industry. Following this keynote address the Minister will recognize the three Best Practices Award winners for their new or innovative approach to their farm businesses.

AgChoices 2009



The early part of the afternoon is dedicated to the Ag Info Market. From a menu of two-dozen available information sessions, producers can choose five 20-minute sessions they consider most relevant to them.

To round out the day, Terry Betker of Meyers Norris Penny will outline how to take the day's big ideas and make them work in your own business.

Says McCormick: "Give us just one day of your time, and *AgChoices* will put you in touch with leading experts, producers who've done it all and business tools that can help turn opportunity into success."

For more information on *AgChoices 2009*, see the brochure included with this edition of *Renewal Now*. To register, visit www.agriculture.alberta.ca/renewal or call the Ag-Info Centre at 1-800-387-6030. Why not get to Red Deer the night before and relax? The Capri Centre has accommodation packages available for *AgChoices* registrants. Contact them at 1-800-662-7197.

Upcoming Winter 2008/09 Events

For more details and events go to: Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development Web page at www.agriculture.alberta.ca > Directories > Events > Fairs & Exhibitions > Coming Events.

Dec. 19 - 20, 2008	Beef Pen Show	Medicine Hat	Feb. 18 - 19, 2009	Step It Up... Today for Tomorrow Conference	Red Deer
Dec. 19 - 20, 2008	Cowboy Christmas Trade Show	Medicine Hat	Feb. 20 - 22, 2009	Greener Pastures Grazing Management Ltd. - Year Round Grazing Systems	Saskatoon
Dec. 31 - Jan. 1, 2009	Dance with the Bulls	Brooks	Feb. 22 - 23, 2009	Josephburg Presents - Dinner Concert - John Wort Hannam	Josephburg
Jan. 8, 2009	Best Practices Award Application Deadline	Ag-Info Centre	Feb. 23 - 27, 2009	Green Certificate Testing - Northeast Region	Vermilion
Jan. 16 - 17, 2009	Value Plus - A Quest for New Farm Value	Airdrie	Feb. 24 - Mar 2, 2009	Green Certificate Testing - Central Region	Olds
Jan. 20 - 21, 2009	Agronomy Update 2009	Lethbridge	Mar. 9, 2009	Lambing Fundamentals	Olds
Jan. 22, 2009	Tiffin Conference Series	Lethbridge	Mar. 10, 2009	Green Certificate Testing - Northwest Region	Spruce Grove
Jan. 28 - 30, 2009	Canadian Beef School	Olds	Mar. 12, 2009	Tiffin Conference Series	Lethbridge
Jan. 28 - 30, 2009	FarmTech 2009: Global Perspectives ...Local Knowledge	Edmonton	Mar. 20 - 22, 2009	Year Round Grazing Systems - Greener Pastures Grazing Management Ltd.	Edmonton
Jan. 28 - 30, 2009	Livestock Transport Conference	Calgary			
Jan. 29 - 31, 2009	Food: Today. Tomorrow. Together: Ensuring Healthy Local Food for All Albertans	Edmonton			
Jan. 30, 2009	Agri-Preneur Scholarship Application Deadline				
Feb. 2 - 6, 2009	Hungry For Change: Transcending Feast, Famine and Frenzy	Edmonton			
Feb. 4 - 5, 2009	Green Certificate Testing - Peace Region	Fairview			
Feb. 11, 2009	AgChoices 2009 - What's the Big Idea?	Red Deer			
Feb. 11, 2009	Farm Succession Planning - Three Hills	Three Hills			
Feb. 11 - 12, 2009	Green Certificate Testing - Southern Region	Lethbridge			
Feb. 17, 2009	Black Angus Bull Sale	Claresholm			
Feb. 18 - 20, 2009	6th Annual Alberta Beef Industry Conference	Red Deer			

Are you thinking about how you will farm in the future? Do you have a new innovative idea and would like help putting your great ideas into play?

The Best Practices Awards are for you. Submit your business plan by January 8, 2009 and you could win one of three \$10,000 prizes of customized essential business tools and services. Visit www.agriculture.alberta.ca/renewal or call the Ag-Info Centre at 1-800-387-6030 for your application.

Renewal Now! is published three times per year in the Fall, Winter and Spring. If you know someone who would like receive a complimentary subscription to Renewal Now! newsletter, please contact:

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Renewal Now newsletter is funded through the Agricultural Policy Framework, a federal-provincial-territorial initiative that aims to make Canada the leader in food safety, innovation and environmentally responsible agriculture production.

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For more information please visit: www.agriculture.alberta.ca/renewal