Province opens state-of-the-art animal disease surveillance lab

Alberta’s efforts in animal disease detection and research received a substantial boost with the opening of the province’s $14-million, state-of-the-art Level 3 Biocontainment Lab. The new facility puts Alberta on the cutting edge of animal disease detection and research.

“Animal health threats are a reality we’ve come to know quite well in Alberta,” said Doug Horner, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. “It is vital that we not only manage these threats, but also expand our understanding of them. This facility makes Alberta a leader in animal disease detection and research.”

The lab will significantly increase Alberta’s testing capacity for animal diseases such as bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), chronic wasting disease (CWD) and avian influenza (AI). While the initial focus of the lab will be on testing, it will also be used for animal disease research, in collaboration with the Alberta Research Council and the University of Alberta.

The two-storey building, adjacent to the O.S. Longman Building in south Edmonton, houses the 750-square-metre Level 3 lab. Modular design allows the testing areas to be expanded or modified when required, such as during an animal health emergency.

The lab is fitted with the latest in biocontainment features, including stringent air and waste handling systems, allowing for a safe and controlled environment. “Concrete walls, break-resistant glass, stringent air handling and filtering capabilities and specialized waste handling systems are just some of the design features incorporated to ensure those who work in the lab and those who live near it are safe,” said Dr. Lyle Oberg, Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Since September 2004, Canada has tested more than 87,000 high-risk cattle as part of an enhanced BSE surveillance program — 44,000 of those from Alberta. In addition to surveillance initiatives, Alberta is in the process of implementing mandatory age verification for all young cattle slaughtered in Alberta processing plants as of April 1, 2007.

For more information, visit Alberta Agriculture’s website at www.agric.gov.ab.ca.

Contact: Ken Manninen
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Scholarships for agri-preneurs

In January 2006, ten entrepreneurs from across Alberta received scholarships enabling them to attend the North American Farmers’ Direct Marketing Association (NAFDMA) convention in Texas. The scholarship program partially sponsors farm direct marketing agri-preneurs to attend educational national and international conferences, tours or workshops.

The Ag-Entrepreneurship Division of Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and the Renewal Chapter of the Ag Policy Framework are working together with the Camrose Regional Exhibition (Country Roads) and the Peace Value Added Food and Agriculture Association (Learn Agri-Food Network) to support continuous learning and innovative educational opportunities for Alberta agri-preneurs. This year, they will partially sponsor up to 15 farm direct marketing agri-preneurs to attend educational national and international conferences, tours or workshops. Applications must be received by February 15, 2006.

“The Agri-Preneur Scholarship is a program that supports leadership development and mentorship training,” says Karen Goad, with Alberta Agriculture’s Farm Direct Marketing Initiative, Grande Prairie. “There are still opportunities for agri-preneurs to take advantage of this program. It’s as simple as applying to attend an appropriate learning event, one that will present new business and marketing ideas to the attendee and provide the opportunity to network with other farm direct marketers, ag tourism operators and farmers’ market managers.”

Examples of eligible events include out-of-province farmers’ market association conferences and events as:

- Beyond the City Lights – Rural Tourism Conference Series hosted by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/rural/events/bcl/Lights-bcl.htm)
- Growing Your Opportunity conference (www.gov.on.ca/omafra)

Scholarships will be awarded on a first come first receive basis. Farm direct marketers must act fast as time is running out. The money is only available to attend events occurring prior to March 30, 2006, but application deadline is February 15, 2006.

Eligible Alberta agri-preneurs:

- are committed to lifelong learning
- will write a summary report and share their ideas and experiences with Alberta Agriculture staff and other agri-preneurs on their return to Alberta
- have enthusiasm for farm direct marketing or ag tourism industries
- are willing to act as ambassadors for the Alberta farm direct marketing industry

The scholarship will pay appropriate conference, tour and workshop registration costs to a maximum of $1000 per farm unit.

Application forms are available on Alberta Agriculture’s website, Ropin’ The Web at www.agric.gov.ab.ca, follow the links Business & Economics/Ag-Entrepreneurship/Farm Direct Marketing, or by contacting Martine Bolinger, Grande Prairie, (780) 538-5633, e-mail: martine.bolinger@gov.ab.ca, or Marian Williams, Camrose (780) 679-5168, e-mail: marian.williams@gov.ab.ca.

Agri-preneurs must complete the application thoroughly as judges use this information in the evaluation and decision process. Be sure to submit a letter of recommendation along with the completed application.

A selection committee will review the applications and choose the successful candidates.

Contact: Karen Goad (780) 538-5629

Learn how to handle livestock safely

Alberta Farm Animal Care (AFAC) is offering a one-day Safe Livestock Handling for Injury Prevention workshop for Green Certificate trainees, trainers and testers.

The workshops, presented by Jennifer Woods, will present information on:

- animal handling
- animal behaviour, including fear, herd instinct and stress points
- flight zone and range of influence
- understanding cause and effect of stress
- recognizing illness, injury and distress – the options available
- disease and human health hazards
- workplace safety
- safe use and application of livestock medications

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The AFAC livestock handling courses are scheduled for:

- **Fairview** – February 17, 2006
- **Olds** – March 2, 2006
- **Stony Plain** – March 18, 2006
- **Lethbridge** – March 25, 2006

“When these workshops were offered last spring, each one was filled to capacity. Early registration is recommended,” says Raelene Mercer, Green Certificate coordinator with Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Edmonton.

Registration for Green Certificate trainees is free. A minimal fee of $20 will be charged at the door for trainers and testers. Registration includes all workbooks and lunch.

For more information, visit the AFAC website at www.afac.ab.ca.

To register, contact the Ag-Info Centre toll-free at 1-800-387-6030.

**Contact:** Raelene Mercer  
(780) 427-4183

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**Establishing perennial forage crops**

Establishing productive perennial forage stands is often a difficult task. Many factors, such as field preparation, seeding date and seeding systems, can influence the ability to successfully germinate and establish a perennial forage stand. As a result, it is important to take time to plan a forage seeding program.

“Forage stands often end up being ‘thin stands’ as a result of both poor seedling survival and low seeding densities,” says Gordon Hutton, forage industry specialist with Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development’s Ag-Info Centre.

“Using generic seeding rates may be fine under some seeding conditions, but may be totally inappropriate under different conditions. Final bulk seeding rates should be based on seeding densities that reflect both seedbed conditions and seed quality.”

A new factsheet from Alberta Agriculture, *Perennial Forage Establishment in Alberta* provides many helpful tips on selecting forage species, field preparation, weed control, fertility management and includes information on the steps to take to evaluate the success of a forage seeding.”
**Farm safety seminar**

Planting the Seeds for Farm Safety 2006 is the theme of a farm safety seminar being held at the Heritage Inn, Taber on February 22, 2006. The one-day seminar and tradeshow begins with registration at 9:00 a.m. Presentations commence at 9:30 a.m. and conclude at 4:00 p.m. Presentations include:

- Electrocution – how to prevent it on the farm – dynamics of electricity
- Vaughn Webb – testimonial
- WCB and how it applies to farms
- Hazards identification and assessment
- Safe handling of pesticides and other chemical products
- Life survival first aid

Growers and producers of all backgrounds, their spouses and staff are all welcome to attend this free seminar. A name draw will be made and 10 participants will receive an Emergency First Aid Course. For further information on this seminar, contact Charles Young (780) 427-4316 or Laurel Aitken (780) 427-4231, farm safety coordinators with Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

**Dairy seminar**

The 2006 Western Canadian Dairy Seminar (WCDS) is being held at the Capri Hotel, Convention and Trade Centre, Red Deer, on March 7 to 10, 2006. The four-day seminar features pre-conference workshops on the first day. The seminar is split into seven sessions:

- Getting the Most Out of Your Cows
- Feeding and Management
- The Business of Dairying
- Lessons Learned on Farm
- Water, Vitamins and Minerals
- Health and Management
- Milking Management

The impressive line-up of 24 speakers and presenters represent industry, production, research and academia from across Canada and the U.S. The seminar is designed for participants who want to improve their knowledge and decision making abilities in dairy production and technology. The primary objective of the seminar is to inform and challenge those in the dairy industry to take a lead role in the development of the industry through the adoption of the latest technology and information available. To qualify for the advance registration rate, the full registration fee must be postmarked no later than February 6, 2006. The early registration fee is $195 Cdn (including GST) per person. After February 6, 2006, the single registration will be $235 Cdn (including GST) per person. For further information, contact the WCDS at (780) 492-3236 or e-mail wcds@ualberta.ca.