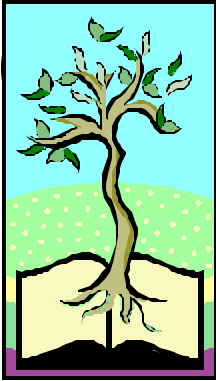


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SMALL SCALE
FOOD PROCESSOR
Association (SSFPA)

Sound Bites

The newsletter with a vision of regional food sustainability

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A Thought for Food

Consider a thought

If the price for your crop keeps going down because somewhere else in the world has a competitive advantage that drives the price down, do you decide to plant twice as much, and work twice as hard, to get the same returns as last year? "No" you say, "growing food is not like harvesting trees or extracting minerals that other regions have access to! There has to be a better solution!"

Growers are also entrepreneurs, and as one solution to this dilemma, there are many in western Canada who have been gathering information on new, or rediscovered, crops, livestock and strategies with the intent to diversify. From organics to ginseng to emus, the first steps have been taken; steps that are intended to increase family farm incomes to a fair living wage, and produce a nutritious food that the current market trends are demanding.

Another approach growers are considering is to add value to their production by becoming a small-scale food processor for local farmers' markets and retailers. But this also poses its own set of questions. Does the grower want to also invest in processing equipment or certification or skilled labour training to further increase the profit margin on farm gate sales? Does a grower then want to learn everything about marketing the product further than their farm gate? Or would a grower want the security that could be offered by a flexible marketing network production contract with a regional processor?

These questions are being raised by growers all across BC and Alberta.

These, and more, were also identified during a Human Resource Development Canada (HRDC) project on the Saanich Peninsula and Victoria, called the *Community Promise: A Local Labour Market Study. Volume 5: Report on the Agri Food Sector* Produced by CEDCO Victoria May 2002. (See http://www.cedco.bc.ca/publications/community_promise.html)

The Community Promise objective was to research labour market demand and barriers in order to improve the community-based skills to deal with human resource requirements in specific industrial sectors. The study included the regional Organic Agri-food sector. Community groups participated to ensure the study had a strong community-based approach. The Community Promise growers reported that they "recognize the economic potential of adding value to their primary production but they do not have processing facilities that comply with the federal Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) regulations. However, "67% plan to diversify into value-added food processing"

The report recommends market-based decisions for new training programs, changes to the regulatory framework, organizations that are linked in a food value-chain, and increased access to financing and funding to support value-added development.

Do these recommendations sound like something that could benefit your region? Yes, but in the days of funding cuts and government withdrawal of services, how will they occur?

This is where the newly incorporated Small Scale Food Processor Association (SSFPA) comes into play. It was formed after two years of meetings with inter-

ested parties in BC and Alberta. The process has been to address how regional self-organized food value chains can be supported at the provincial, federal and international levels. Growers, processors, retailers, technical assistance providers, 'patient and friendly' finance representatives, educators and consumers helped design the by-laws for the federal non-profit corporation. Their definition of small-scale is 25 or less full time equivalent employees, but a **secondary membership category was set up that includes large processors, growers, and all other supporters of the food value-chain.** The logic is that growers would want to have contract sales to processors, or, they may decide to diversify and process their products before commodities leave the farm gate. Connecting both approaches makes sense. The SSFPA is now conducting regional workshops to build the infrastructure needed to enable thriving agri-food enterprises.

These regional workshops are now being called the 'Field to Table partnership project', which has two developers travel to three regions in BC and one in Alberta to facilitate a two-day workshop. They will meet with a regional self-organized planning group that will work to prepare a regional agri-food asset map, analyze their situation, and develop a regional action plan and business case. Following the four regional visits, the representatives will group these regional plans into a federal-level plan for implementation in BC and Alberta. This plan will focus on a business case to ensure sustainability. People who are interested in participating in this initiative contact Frank Moreland at 250-370-5167 or ssfpa@pacificcoast.net.

Remember:

When you have a thought for food processors, you could be thinking about yourself.