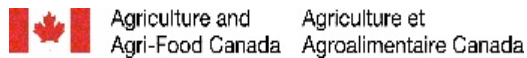




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Biogas Feasibility Study Produces Promising Results

The P.E.I. farm of the future could be powered at least in part from biogas made from livestock manure says P.E.I. Environmental Coalition's Kate MacDonald who is more convinced than ever that on-farm biogas production is a winning formula economically and environmentally.

MacDonald is the coalition's executive director. It is her organization, with funding help from the P.E.I. ADAPT Council, that recently commissioned Professor Andy Trivett of the Engineering Department at the University of Prince Edward Island to conduct a biogas feasibility study on three Island farms.

"While there have been a number of similar studies conducted in the United States, the farms they were using there were much bigger, and we wanted to see if this is something producers here could explore on a very small scale," said MacDonald.

Trivett and summer student Matthew Hall looked at two Island dairy farms and a beef operation. Generation of electricity by biogas is the possibility most producers want to look at. "They would not be interested in selling power back to the grid, at least not at this point. What they want to do now is more geared towards cutting costs," she said.

Project research indicates that on-farm biogas production would successfully generate a relatively quick payback in lower electricity costs. However, MacDonald said the current economic situation in agriculture could make it difficult for producers to afford the up-front capital costs without government help.

The executive director said she would like to see a pilot project established that could measure the potential over an extended period of time. This would also give producers a chance to see how such a system could work, and would help build up a body of knowledge on the topic.

She said one of the major concerns expressed by the producers who took part in the feasibility study was the degree of risk they might be assuming and the lack of a support system in case they encountered problems or challenges.

“Certainly, these concerns are a problem that would disappear as more and more producers adopted the system. And once it was proven to work on several farms, any new producers who signed on to the system would have somewhere to turn if they needed help or advice,” she said.

The Environmental Coalition is willing to partner with industry and government to help take idea to the next level. “We feel now, more than ever, the potential is there and a demonstration project is the next step. Then, every producer interested would simply have to determine how such a system could be best used in their own operation.”

Voices of Experience

Cornell University launched an innovative, online video series that will help agricultural entrepreneurs successfully launch new farms. The video series, titled, “Voices of Experience,” covers essential topics such as financing farm start-up, marketing, profitability, and goal setting, to name just a few. The ‘voices of experience’ in the series are actual farmers who have successfully started their own farm business.

Voices of Experience online videos are available at the Beginning Farmer Project Web site: www.nybeginningfarmers.org. For more information on a variety of small farm topics, visit the Cornell Small Farms website at: www.smallfarms.cornell.edu

Hoop House Webinar for Extending Your Growing Season!

(Free webinar will be held May 7 at 11 a.m.)

Hoop houses can help small-scale farmers grow more and extend their season, bringing a higher price for crops and developing loyal customers. Find out how hoop houses might benefit your crops in a FREE 60-minute webinar from ATTRA – National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service.

Plan on attending Hoop Houses for Extending Your Growing Season to learn why farmers across the country are already using hoop houses, and if this low-cost tool will work for you. Crops grown in hoop houses often produce larger yields and are of a higher quality than field-grown crops. Crops can be ready for the market earlier, capturing a higher price and building a customer base. Hoop houses can also extend growing seasons, creating a yearlong crop in some situations.

In the webinar, we'll cover:

- * The uses and benefits of hoop houses, including increases in crop quality and yields
- * Different types of hoop houses
- * Construction, materials and cost estimates
- * Management of crops, soil fertility, pests and weeds
- * The economics and marketing of crops

There will also be time to have your questions answered.

Your presenters for this webinar are NCAT horticulture specialists Tammy Hinman and Andy

Pressman. Hinman holds a Bachelor's degree from Colorado State University in horticulture food crops and entomology and a Master's degree in food system studies from Antioch University. Pressman has a Master's in sustainable systems from Slippery Rock University. He is a certified permaculture designer. Hinman and Pressman both have market farming experience as well as experience building and growing in hoop houses.

This free webinar will be held May 7 at 11 a.m. MDT. Please register at www.attra.ncat.org/webinars2009/hoophouses .

On the day of the seminar, please join 15 minutes early to allow the required software to download.

TITLE: Hoop Houses for Extending Your Growing Season

WHEN: Thursday, May 7, 11 a.m. MDT

WHERE: www.attra.ncat.org/webinars2009/hoophouses

Separating the Wheat from the Chaff in the Sustainability Debate

Editor's Note: Laura Rance, Editor Manitoba Cooperator, was a guest speaker at ADAPT's recent Annual General Meeting. The following article comes from notes taken during her presentation.

Laura Rance grew up on a farm in Manitoba, and she has devoted her life to journalism in agriculture. She describes herself as a professional observer who likes to appeal to people through the use of words. She noted that the Canadian public is interested in agriculture even though many are two or three generations removed from the farm.

She alluded to the word "consumer" as a terrible word, perhaps this could be better referred to as "citizens". We aim at the stomach in agriculture rather than at the heart when getting the message out. As a result, people, who are interested in understanding food issues are feeling disconnected.

Our food system has become a maze of complicated issues and is in trouble, according to Ms. Lance. Farming is structurally unprofitable; rural and farming communities are in a state of decline; and the environment is suffering. Canadian soil is being lost at an amazing rate, and 50% of the land is not being protected, resulting in the need for more inputs to prevent declining productivity. She believes farming needs a new plan; farmers must adapt or go 'extinct'.

The biggest challenge, Lance sees is to inspire the next generation of farmers. She provided a quote from FAO February 2009: "The world needs to double its food production to feed 9 billion people by 2050". However, Lance believes that it is unlikely that Canadians will be willing to subsidize big agriculture.

She described 'sustainable' as conserving an ecological balance by avoiding depletion of natural resources. There is a common three pillar myth: economic, environment, and social. The sustainability balance should reflect the land first and our connection to it, then the community, and then economy. There are many ideas on how we should get there including: conventional, zero tillage, biotechnology, economies of scale, efficiency, vegetarian, trade, alternative, organic, natural systems, small scale, holistic, grass fed, local, etc.. Any one method

is not the answer to the problem. She feels that if there is a way to combine zero tillage with organic, this may be the answer.

The conflict is human nature versus mother nature. Nature is always changing as biological processes have a mind of their own. People don't change easily. As part of human nature, we are conscious of the need for a shift in values, but we are driven by unconscious actions. Ms. Rance alluded to the book written by John Ralston Saul, titled, 'The Unconscious Civilization.' The key is to stop treating the soil like dirt, she said, because, 'Nature bats last!'

Lance showed pictures of the impact GMO canola is having in Manitoba. The pollen is transferring into weed populations, helping to make them resistant to herbicides. Volunteer crops of canola are regenerating in fields but due to patent laws farmers are not allowed to harvest them and must destroy the crop.

One positive sign of change that is occurring in holistic system management, she reported, is Manitoba agriculture's commitment to public research. The department conducts experiments and trains farmers in sustainable systems agriculture. Once the training is completed, the participants continue to meet and review their practices.

The natural systems agriculture model attempts to mimic nature. A good example of this approach is being used by Colin Rosengren. He farms 4500 acres of land in an inter-cropping approach which is a "new" approach to cropping. Grass fed beef is another example of this approach; producing beef which finishes beef on forage rather than in feedlots.

She also described new trials, based on research coming out of the Land Institute, that is experimenting with the commercial development of perennial grains. These new crops, according to Lance, show great promise for cutting down erosion and reducing production costs.

Overall, the two key points Lance stressed were the need to adopt a natural systems approach to agriculture and the importance of providing funding for research into this critical phase of agriculture.

Laura Rance can be reached by e-mail: laura@fbcpublishing.com

Canadian Planners Put Food on Menu: 100 Mile Diet May Become Survival Strategy by Laura Rance

When planners -- the people who determine zoning and design neighbourhoods -- start talking about food and sustainability, you know the times they are a changin'!

The Canadian Institute of Planners followed the lead of its American counterpart at its annual meeting held in Winnipeg this month by putting planning for food and agriculture on the agenda. Speakers told participants it's been about 50 years since what and how people will eat has been considered part of the public planner's role.

Maybe it's because of the spectre of declining energy reserves and global warming is finally seeping into the public's consciousness. Maybe it's due to the linkages being drawn between the

food system and rising levels of obesity, or the safety scares related to our reliance on foods produced and processed by big companies in far-off places.

"You are what you eat and right now, that's not looking too good," noted Jim Hiley, a land evaluation specialist with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, as he outlined reasons for the growing interest in sustainable food systems.

Or maybe it's because prices have been driven up over the past year to the point where people no longer take food for granted.

Whatever the reasons, food has now joined the list of other necessities of life, such as clean air, potable water and shelter, that planners are starting to examine more closely in the context of building and maintaining sustainable communities.

Why wasn't it there before?

Jerry Kaufman, a professor emeritus with the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, told the Winnipeg meeting that until recently, there was a sense that the food system would look after itself.

But this failure to plan for food and agriculture has resulted in the degradation and loss of the primary resource needed to produce it -- land. Canada, for example, is the second-largest land mass in the world, but the only major producing countries that have fewer arable acres are the likes of the United Kingdom and France -- countries that are a fraction of Canada's size.

Only 7.3 per cent of Canada's massive land base can be used for agricultural purposes compared to 13.9 per cent of China, 41 per cent of the United States, and 63 per cent of Argentina. Half of Canada's prime farmland has already disappeared to urban development and subdivisions have been gobbling it up at an escalating pace.

The 40,000-member American Planning Association planners went so far as to develop a policy guide that promotes food systems that strengthen the local economy, improve the health of the region's citizens, are ecologically sustainable, are socially equitable and just, sustain traditional food cultures and promote comprehensive food planning at the community and regional levels.

It is a policy ethic that considers food in a much broader context than as a saleable commodity. It treats land as a resource rather than a possession.

Canadian planners haven't collectively gone there yet. But some cities have started to consider the implications of the changing paradigm.

Vancouver's city planning commission organized a series of seminars in 2005-2006 designed to help citizen planning groups examine scenarios such as Peak Oil price shocks and global warming. The exercise in crystal ball gazing underlined some stark realities.

While increasing urbanization combined with large-scale agriculture has been the model for

modern efficiency, those development strategies don't fare well in a resource-depleted world.

"Everything we take for granted right now is up for grabs," says Richard Balfour, a Vancouver-based architect who chaired the strategic sustainable planning process for the Vancouver City Planning Commission.

The debate continues over when or if the world will actually run out of oil, but there is growing awareness that increasing demand on the limited supplies could make petroleum prohibitively expensive for all but critical necessities. No clear technological fix has emerged.

In the book, *Strategic Sustainable Planning -- A Civil Defense Manual for Cultural Survival*, that resulted from the Vancouver workshops, Balfour and co-author Eileen McAdam Keenan say communities must choose between a radical adaptation now or endure a meltdown of the economy and infrastructure that amassed during the industrial age.

"During the century of cheap oil, planning policy in North America has resulted in the creation of cities, towns and neighbourhoods where no alternative to the automobile to carry out the necessities of daily life exists," they write. "We are now the possessors of an enormous automobile infrastructure clogged with frustrated motorists trying to commute increasing distances every day, and despite the clear warnings, we're still building more."

He predicts Peak Oil could push civilization back to the future -- to a time when communities were small, largely food self-sufficient and fuelled predominantly by renewable energy.

In other words, the 100 Mile Diet might become less about fads and more about survival.

Laura Rance is editor of the Manitoba Co-operator.
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Haskap Berries a New Commercial Fruit for Prince Edward Island

Haskap *Lonicera caerulea*

Discover an experimental stunning berry taste sensation with Haskap berries! Haskap berries have a kiwi like texture with a juicy blend of blueberry and raspberry flavour.

An exciting new development has taken place in the rapidly expanding fresh and processed berry field. Haskap berries, a tamed wild berry species native to boreal regions is now available for commercial development. With a kiwi like texture, over layered with a rich raspberry and blueberry flavor, this better berry presents a unique taste experience.

Phytocultures Ltd. is the licensed propagator of these plants in Eastern Canada and is developing 5 varieties for release in 2009.

The shape of things to come...

A tremendous industry has developed in the production and supply of fresh berries for today's consumers. Gone are the days of grabbing a basket and heading out to the berry patch to pick some fresh ones for breakfast. Consumers can now choose berries in supermarkets. The picking is also different, consumers choose from many berry types: strawberries from California, Florida or Poland; blackberries from Chile; and blueberries from New Jersey.

Research is continuing toward development of an ideal Haskap berry. A berry that will travel from vine to bowl, arrive intact and deliver that unique Haskap flavour sensation. Exciting new cultivars are on the horizon and will see the broad expansion in this new Canadian berry sensation.

Special points of interest:

- Frost tolerant flowers
- Early picking
- Winter kill proof –40
- Japanese markets
- Organic production
- High Anti-oxidant levels
- Mechanical Harvesting
- Exceptional taste
- Native Pollinators
- Canadian development
- Extend the growing season

For more information contact: www.phytocultures.com/index.asp