



BC's AGRI-FOOD Update



Honourable Pat Bell
Minister of Agriculture and Lands

Featuring News From the Agriculture Sector of B.C.'s Ministry of Agriculture and Lands

JANUARY 2007

FROM THE DESK OF PAT BELL

Happy New Year, everyone. I hope you enjoyed great, grown-in-B.C. products over the holidays. I did!

I hosted an event in my office in mid-December where we laid out a table bursting with B.C. products that could be used in holiday cooking (all of which we donated to a local food bank after the event). It was a great way to show off the diversity and quality of our agricultural products and I encourage everyone to continue to support local growers throughout the year.

In December I also released the most comprehensive farmed fish health report ever in North America. The report shows B.C.'s results-based regulatory regime is working and British Columbians should be proud that we are acknowledged as one of the world leaders in fish health management. This is significant as we continue to work at building a sustainable aquaculture industry that co-exists with wild stocks.

The year ended with some extraordinary weather, with storms in coastal B.C. causing a lot of damage. The shellfish growers were hit hard – the high winds scattered rafts, nets and other equipment over a very wide area. The industry was quick in its clean-up efforts, though, and we were able to provide funds to help remove storm-damaged equipment from beaches and waterways.

The holidays are a time when many people give help to those who need it. Employees across government do a lot for their communities, and recently our ministry staff in Kelowna were recognized for their

Continued on pg. 2, see FROM THE DESK OF PAT BELL



Agriculture and Lands Minister Pat Bell was joined by Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture Planning Val Roddick and B.C. Agriculture Council Executive Director Steve Thomson for an all-B.C. Christmas meal in his Victoria office. The meal was prepared to remind British Columbians that the Best Meals on Earth are made with B.C. agriculture products.

Multi-zone production increases mushroom farm productivity

Production at a mushroom farm in Langley is going way up as a result of new technology that shortens the growing cycle. Mushroom growing in B.C. has traditionally required a 10-week growing cycle, but All Seasons Mushrooms has adopted technology developed in Europe that shortens the cycle by four weeks.

Traditionally, phase II composting (pasteurization and conditioning of the compost) and phase III (spawn run) has been completed in the growing rooms on the mushroom farm. With the new process, a separate facility will complete the phase II and III processes. The result is a shortened growing cycle and reduced utility costs. The number of crop cycles on the mushroom farm can increase from 5.2 to eight crop cycles per year with the adoption of this new technology.

Two other farms in British Columbia have recently adopted this new technology, which is also used in other growing areas in Canada and throughout the world and has the potential to increase individual farm production by 25 to 55 per cent. This new growing technology, while expensive, holds great promise for B.C.'s mushroom industry.

Continued from pg. 1, FROM THE DESK OF PAT BELL

contributions. As a summer fundraiser for the Provincial Employees Community Services Fund, staff at the Employers' Advisers Office, Workers' Advisers Office, and the Employment Standards Branch in Kelowna hosted "Weiner Wednesdays," a hot dog sale on the last Wednesday of each month. The organizers sent a note to thank MAL staff in Kelowna for supporting their fundraising efforts. I'd like to start the year by echoing that sentiment – thank you to all of our employees for supporting British Columbians in so many ways.

There will be a number of significant milestones for the ministry in 2007. I particularly look forward to seeing the report from the Agricultural Planning Committee. The committee spent months gathering input from farmers, local governments, special interest groups and industry on how we can make B.C.'s agricultural sector more competitive, diverse and sustainable. The report will also contain recommendations on how we can increase public awareness about food production.

2007 will also see the expansion of our School Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program and a pilot project on accessing forest lands for agricultural purposes. I also look forward to hosting my provincial and federal counterparts in Whistler for the annual meeting of Canada's agriculture ministers and our continued discussion on national agricultural policies.

Lastly, in 2007, the Special Legislative Committee on Aquaculture will table its recommendations to government and I look forward to receiving and responding to such an important undertaking.

As this new year begins, I wish for good growing weather, fair markets and the best of health and happiness for everyone.

Until next month,

Pat Bell

Minister of Agriculture and Lands

To respond to this newsletter, or for more information, please e-mail: AL.MINISTER@GOV.BC.CA



Ministry of
Agriculture
and Lands

Adapting Western Canadian Feeding Practices to Central B.C. Conditions

The ministry's Prince George Regional Operation staff, in conjunction with the Nechako Valley Cattlemen Association and Prince George Cattlemen Association, hosted a Swath Grazing Field demonstration on Nov. 17 and 18, 2006.

Several producers participated in a demonstration project that used swath grazing as a management tool to extend the grazing season in central B.C. Small fields of swathed oats were left on the ground during the fall months in order to be stripped grazed in November and December. The summer drought conditions and the massive early season snowfall tested the practicality of swath grazing and created skeptical ranchers.

After a day of watching cattle swath graze in tough conditions and discussions with Duane McCartney of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, there are new believers in the extended season grazing in the central interior.

- contributed by Brent Barclay, MAL Prince George

Linda Swirhun – Spirit in the face of adversity

Linda Swirhun provides support and service to clients of the Crop Insurance program in Kelowna and is an asset in more ways than we can count. She has worked for the ministry for about 16 years and makes a lot of people's jobs much easier. She does everything from looking after grower files to entering data to keep the Crop Insurance program rolling smoothly.



Linda Swirhun with her trademark smile

In addition to her skills, Linda is known for her great spirit. Two years ago, she experienced a burst brain aneurysm; her doctors didn't expect her to make it, but they underestimated Linda. She spent six weeks in intensive care and was off work for a year. It would have been longer if the doctors had had their way but Linda, who truly loves her job, was anxious to get back.

She took the same approach last year when her 27-year-old son was killed in a car accident, and came back to work after four days away. She didn't want to take more time and, the way she sees it, these events have made her a stronger person. Her love of life certainly hasn't diminished. In fact, she's the one people go to see if they need a smile. Linda appreciates things more now, and it shows.