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Programs **Agri-Food Outlook Forum Summary**

Presentations and Briefs Below is an e-mail letter from Rory McAlpine, Deputy Minister BCMAFF and a copy of the report from the Agriculture Outlook Forum for your review. The Council and Council representatives will continue to be

Announcements & Updates involved in the ongoing follow-up activities arising from this initiative.

Links If you have any questions or comments please contact our office.

Membership and Directors (password protected) Steve Thomson, Executive Director

August 11, 2004

To: All Outlook Forum participants and invitees

On behalf of the planning committee, I want to thank all of you for making the Agri-Food Outlook Forum such a success. Comments from participants indicated that it was very valuable, especially the opportunity it provided to communicate face-to-face with leaders from other links of the "food value chain". There also appears to be consensus in favour of holding another forum next year, which would build on this one by addressing specific issues in more detail, and ultimately weaving together our actions to achieve strategic focus for the BC agri-food sector.

Forum participants also indicated how important it was to report out broadly to industry on the Forum's discussions and potential outcomes. I am attaching a summary document of the highlights of the session for your information and sharing with others.

Some areas of discussion seemed especially important to the Forum participants, including:

- The importance of improving knowledge and awareness throughout the value chain, from producer through to consumer (e.g. improve the producers' understanding of processors' and consumers' needs, the "food literacy" of consumers, agricultural awareness of youth, etc).
- The importance of leveraging our research strengths and obtain efficiencies through encouragement of clusters and alliances. The agriculture and food sector needs to make all sectors of the scientific and research community (e.g. health, environment, etc) understand their links to agri-food, and facilitate partnering for greater effectiveness.
- It is evident that business is prepared to manage much of the risk of the market without direct

government involvement, but the collective point was made that governments continue to have a strong role in policy, standards and regulation to create a business climate in which all players are able to compete.

- It is important that the regulatory and taxation roles of all levels of government be clearly defined and streamlined. Also, that governments and educational institutions continue to have a strong role to play as honest brokers, to facilitate decisions and directions with industry partners.
- There was broad support to take some action to assist the general public and policy makers recognize the link between a healthy diet (eating healthy BC food products) and improved public health and reduced incidence of disease. And further, to cooperate with other agencies in developing policies and programs to build on this link to everyone's mutual advantage.
- There is support to convene roundtables of stakeholders, identify promising technologies, and develop and implement a strategic direction for the bioproducts sector.
- It was recognized by all that industry must have appropriate food safety standards in place to maintain and expand their markets. There was also general acceptance that in most cases government must lead the process of establishing food safety standards to ensure a consistent approach.
- The 2010 Winter Olympics is thought to present a fantastic opportunity for the BC agri-food sector. Forum participants believed that, in order to capitalize on this potential, leadership is required to assist industry to ramp up now with products and tourism experiences which will vault them into sustained markets post - 2010.
- Overall, there was a sense among participants that in many ways, the diversity and relatively small size of BC's agri-food industry is a strength rather than a weakness, offering unique and different products for niche markets and experiences like agritourism. There was considerable momentum to take more action to exploit the potential.

Participants also made it clear that there was an expectation of immediate and sustained action on some of the points of discussion. It was generally agreed, however, that delivery of any follow-up initiatives would use existing infrastructure and resources wherever possible. Activity on follow up initiatives is already taking place on several fronts:

1. Value chains - preliminary plans are underway to initiate at least one pilot project to improve value chain relationships, in the meat sector. This will be coordinated with the BC Food and Beverage Processors Council events planned for the fall of 2004.
2. 2010 - the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries is leading an initiative with industry to identify the best opportunities being presented by 2010 for the agriculture and agri-food industry, and assist that industry in mobilizing resources now to fully exploit those opportunities.
3. Research - there have been preliminary discussions to convene a session among post secondary educational institutions with direct and indirect links to agri-food research, and related entities, to work toward achieving a coordinated research approach in British Columbia.
4. Health, wellness, and Healthy BC - consideration is being given to participating in an initiative or contest to improve public health through healthy eating, with Ministry of Health Services and other partners. The initiative would link healthy eating (agri-food) to health care and disease prevention, and perhaps utilize the 2010 theme.
5. Bioproducts - sector leaders and the ministry staff are working together to develop a strategy (including the creation of a BC Bioproducts Association) to create a sound environment for the growth of the bioproducts sector. Along with other elements, the strategy intends to identify the most promising technologies, and work to achieve some initial product successes which will create momentum for strategy implementation.

6. Inter-governmental coordination - this fall senior representatives of agricultural agencies of the provincial and federal governments will meet to take stock of policy and regulatory streamlining efforts in BC.

The planning committee believes that the Forum was an excellent first step in collectively setting a future direction for BC's agriculture and food industries. I am confident we will all share in the responsibility for maintaining our hold on the valuable threads of thought we generated, and hold each other accountable to continue our dialogue and direction to realize the tremendous potential for improved growth, prosperity and quality of life for all those involved in this important industry.

On behalf of the planning committee, thank you again for your participation and your commitment to building a dynamic agri-food future for BC. If you have any comments or suggestions, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely yours,

Rory McAlpine
Deputy Minister (for the Forum Planning Committee)

Agri-Food Outlook Forum, June 14 &15, 2004 Breakout Group Discussion Notes Summarized

1. Research/Education

- For agriculture education, other countries have “practicum” requirements. Also, students in other countries are job ready, unlike Canada, where focus is different, somewhat academic.
- How do resources get pooled, mutually focused?
 - Industry/education institution
 - Industry funding on basis of student #'s
 - Education institutions competing and can't afford to
- Investment Ag: how do we align funds to go beyond Ag in classroom/AgAware
- Youth in industry are 1st component of value chain
- New technologies – e.g. IT –youth find snazzy, cool
- Need to educate industry on current issues (e.g. council)
- Need to educate producers on down-stream marketing issues (e.g. produce)
- Specific education for Viticulturists/Oenologists
- Need research re: alternatives on options, new crops, new methods e.g. economics of displacing Brazil organic sugar for processors
- Research variety/methods to extend season for “fresh” local foods

- Help make cooking a fun experience, esp. for youth, could consider a youth cooking program – “School Chef”
- MoHS “Action Schools” program is bringing results. Expand it maybe with more partners including MAFF, universities
- Improve the “Food Literacy” level of consumers - build awareness of benefits of eating more fruits, vegetables. Help general public make connection between nutritional food and health.
- Estimated \$1 BILLION annual in savings to health system if everyone in BC ate 5 servings of fruits and vegetables every day – this is a thing we could influence
- Applied research to develop types of prepared foods (healthy) similar to success that salad bags is enjoying
- R&D to look at food safety vulnerabilities, risks and their magnitude – e.g. pasteurization of eggs
- Producers did not get into business to sell – producers selling direct need training on sales, promotion
- Who is our visitor – need baseline research to identify needs, wants for emerging and experiential sectors
- Retail/Distribution issues – with consolidation of retailers very hard to get produce to local retail, e.g. berries – seasonality. Need research on how this could be done

2. Partnerships/Communication

- No one group alone can successfully grow their sector – partnering needed, e.g. Garden Wise Directory, Ind/Ind partners, Ind/IAF
- Existing production/processing/distribution system cannot easily respond to new demands hence some products get sourced offshore just because its easier, quicker
- Need more flexibility/response within meat chain. Responding to BSE crisis and extra-meat issues demonstrated this need
- Address the fragmentation in the various livestock industries. Partnerships weak in the livestock/meat value chain. Too many producer groups.
- With traceability every producer has to be part of system or none get benefit.
- For 2010, examples of potential partners will include the Destination Marketing Organizations (DMO's) such as Tourism Whistler, Tourism Vancouver, local Chambers of Commerce, etc. in addition to the BC Chef's Association, BC Wine Institute, BC Culinary Tourism Society, BC Agritourism Alliance, BC Landscape & Nursery Association, BC Fishing Alliance, etc.

3. Government/Industry/Academic Interface

- A strong government role needed in policy – need quick access to registrations of pesticides for example
- Neutral group needed to facilitate initiatives, i.e. Academia
- Need for all three groups to mutually define research priorities
- Local Government Role expanded
 - Local planning re food shopping, how to minimize “food trips” by thinking about

- regional infrastructure/zoning
 - Show/acquire literacy re local farms, food generally
- Need to clarify accountability for regulation and tax, especially for farm value adding – what level of government is responsible for what?
 - need one-stop capability
 - could taxing for farm processors be phased?
- AEPC model of inter-ministry/industry group to stickhandle/resolve regulatory issues
- Consider possible junk food tax to promote healthier eating
 - Or, limitations on timing of advertising e.g. no junk food ads during prime time or when small children are watching
- Some things, traceability included, will be driven by retailers and be fragmented unless government leads with legislation
- Government information is credible – have a lead role in dealing with misinformation/myth-busting
- Governments must drive area wide (e.g. national) issues – e.g. biosecurity
- Government as a Standards setting body – independent of industry
- MoTH – cooperate on signage for tourism – would be big benefit – need coordination
- Government role important to get competitors to talk to each other, facilitate, help manage confidentiality issues.
- Beverages suggest bring all of government to the table and deal collectively with issues
 - Develop a vision/strategy
- Ministry of Education/Health/MAFF – Ag in the Classroom should be talking more for ag awareness
- Bio-based sector – need a process to “grow” it – if industry left with sole responsibility, the approach will be fragmented
- Need “round tables” – to move forward a whole industry, need to identify opportunities
- Create a 2010 Industry Advisory Committee to act on a consultative basis

4. Marketing

- “Kids” aware of what is cool – make agriculture/healthy food fun
- In many cases, local markets too small – need global – export
- Use “natural” advantages that BC has - “pristine” - market it
- Environmental issues – are they a constraint or opportunity?
- Dairy cows culled on a regular basis. Supply opportunity?
- Must ensure the incentives get to that part of the chain that needs to change.
- Wineries might consider levy for R&D, e.g. 1cent/bottle all wines
- Buying food we produce should be a major goal
 - awareness, education
 - pull of the market – consumer driven/drawn
 - farmer as local hero – awareness – marketing
 - Buy BC – government role in “local” marketing is increasing in North America – many jurisdictions have “buy local” programs

- Procurement policies of institutions – more should buy local food
- Goal for 2010 is to maximize tourism opportunities for the BC agriculture, food, seafood and beverage industries and the agritourism, cuisine, garden, and recreational fishing sectors for 2010
 - Create a 2010 Industry Advisory Committee to act on a consultative basis
 - Timeframe for maximizing the tourism opportunities is:
 - 2005 à 2009 build new products/services and acceptance
 - 2009 à 2010 – Olympics
 - 2010 à 2015 – ongoing benefits, growth opportunities
- Nutrition statistics – BC - Findings, deficiencies
 - Obesity, overweight – 55% BC population overweight
 - “Too little – too much” - 25% calories empty
 - good nutrition costs money
 - connection between poverty and obesity
- Themes - “eat 5” – “sexy veggie”
- § Reinvent Buy BC or similar BC Brand
 - Link organic/natural/nutritional/food to health
- § Schools – create a fresh food school lunch program
- Agritourism one of the best marketing tools for agriculture awareness, importance of agriculture and farm-food link. “We are the face of agriculture”
- § Use point of sale health messaging similar to beef labeling e.g. grilling steak vs marinating steak
- § Leverage opportunities to build the “Experience BC” type of brand with other governments and crown corporations.
- § Need to showcase British Columbia to the world through an innovation product showcase and through procurement offices

5. Other

- Water – key to education – practices will have to be adjusted to maintain access to water
- Look at successful models e.g. meat packing plants
 - Atlantic Canada plant à customer as part owner?
- Liability insurance costs high and are obstacles to agritourism, etc.
 - Legislation to limit liability?
 - Include liability insurance in crop insurance?
- Alcohol, wine and beer regulation – need to be rationalized (Provincially, municipally, in relation to other jurisdictions). Clarity on accountability..
- Finances – gov’t should supply “core funding” to help get groups off the ground, with a sunset clause to ensure sustainability
- Typical challenges among emerging groups, or initiatives like 2010, are the complexities

of coordinating a diverse group, shortage and lack of skilled labour, an lack of a unified visual entity.

6. Priorities for Action

- § Undertake Strategy and Vision making process for wine industry.
- § Participate in BC or National Healthy Eating Challenge.
 - 2010 competition as a theme;
 - challenge/support schools in fitness, healthy living by 2010 (e.g. 10,000 steps./day etc);
 - consider cross compliance of 2010 sponsors – they have to provide a standard of fresh fruits, vegetables to be a 2010 sponsor;
 - BC food industry might become “official supplier” of food to BC teams (training)
- Seek market growth opportunities.
 - Coordinate a 2010 group to lead
 - 2005 à 2009 build new products/services and acceptance
 - 2009 à 2010 – Olympics
 - 2010 à 2015 – ongoing benefits, growth opportunities
 - use experience packages, restaurant opportunities, education for chefs, pre-visits, “enjoy many seasons of agri production”.

BioProducts Recommendations for Next Steps

Convene a series of roundtables to promote (possible as part of 2010) cross pollination and innovation in diverse industry (also engage nationally and internationally).

Report from BioProducts Association - identify most promising technologies/ industries.

Identify win-wins

Suggest “engine” to drive industry

Coordinate government policy with public awareness and encouraging a supportive environment for financing (e.g. Tax credits).

Question was raised on how a portion of the health care budget could be shifted towards agriculture. It was felt that linking agriculture to health care and prevention would be an important message. This could happen, in part, by broadening the Agri-Food Vision to focus on health and well being and Environmental Sustainability.

Education/Development – possibly undergraduate and graduate programs in consultation with industry cross disciplines within and between Universities and Colleges (including a Co-op

program).

Leverage research strengths – e.g. Pharma, BC Cancer Centre, Centre for Excellence in Environmental Health.

Increase research alignment with market.

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