



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

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FROM THE DESK OF PAT BELL

There is a lot going on that has food at the forefront of people's minds. The Provincial Health Officer's report is a good reminder that all of us can be healthier simply by paying attention to what we eat and getting out of the house more often.

We are helping young people learn more about healthy eating and develop a love of growing food through a \$10,800 grant to an initiative called Growing Chefs. This program supports the growth of children's urban agriculture and provides an avenue for chefs and growers to engage in the community and to support food sustainability. This program is a great way of bringing agriculture into our communities and making children, and their families, aware of the vast range of healthy, delicious food we can grow locally.

I spent the week of October 23 at the Union of British Columbia Municipalities' (UBCM) Annual General Meeting in Victoria. I had the pleasure of meeting

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B.C. Going Crazy Over Cranberries

British Columbia's cranberry industry is flourishing with nearly 80 growers producing up to 84 million pounds (840,000 barrels) of fruit. B.C. is the largest producer of cranberries in Canada; our production accounts for 58 per cent of Canadian production and 12 per cent of North American production.



Photo courtesy of the B.C. Cranberry Growers Association

Two recently developed cranberry products have become particularly successful – sweet and dried cranberries, and white cranberry juice. Sweet and dried cranberries, trademarked as Craisins, are becoming a popular, healthy snack choice. This product is marketed by Ocean Spray Inc., who developed the process for this tasty treat.

White cranberry juice is also becoming a popular beverage choice in B.C. households. White cranberries are simply regular cranberries that are harvested earlier before the development of the more familiar red pigment.

Both products were designed to broaden the market appeal of cranberries while preserving the fruit's nutrients and health benefits. Consuming cranberries and cranberry products, which are high in antioxidants, has been linked to protection against heart disease, cancer and other diseases.

InfoBasket – A Great Online Resource

As part of B.C.'s E-government initiative, the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Lands portal, InfoBasket, is designed as a "one-stop shop" for agri-food information on the internet. There are currently 26 communities to assist producers, processors, and clients in accessing a range of information for managing their businesses; such as growing, processing and marketing agri-food products.

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many local mayors and councillors and had many positive discussions with them on agricultural and land issues. These positive talks only happen as a result of the work all of you and your staff have done over the last number of months leading up to UBCM. I would like to personally thank all those involved in getting ready for the UBCM Convention. It takes many months of hard work and everyone involved should give themselves a well-deserved pat on the back.

Earlier this year on B.C. Agriculture Day, I announced \$225,000 in funding for a new awards program for fairs and exhibitions. Participating fairs were asked to create displays to promote safe, high-quality B.C. products.

On Oct. 21 I attended the awards banquet for the B.C. Association of Agricultural Fairs and Exhibitions and had the honour of presenting the awards to fairs that participated in the Showcase of Excellence.

Congratulations to the winners and to the other fairs that participated. They all make an invaluable contribution to agriculture in B.C.

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

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Using the latest technology to "crawl" the internet, InfoBasket assembles thousands of documents from sources locally, and around the world specific to B.C. One of the strengths is the relevance of the articles, which are reviewed and vetted by Ministry of Agriculture and Lands specialists. Also featured are hot topics, event calendars, weather updates, and top picks and a convenient search function to help you find what you need quickly.

Visit InfoBasket at www.infobasket.gov.bc.ca and select from the community list on the main page. We welcome comments and questions, which can be submitted through the feedback section of the site. You can also contact us directly at 1-877-702-5585.

Alison Speirs: Ensuring Safety and Quality of B.C. Food

Alison Speirs knows food safety. A trained health inspector with a background in environmental health and 16 years of experience in food safety, Alison joined the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands as a Food Safety and Quality Specialist three years ago following a stint with the BC Centre for Disease Control.

Alison, who is based out of Abbotsford, is involved with a variety of projects and is a member of the steering committee for the EatSmartBC program, a unique program that combines information on food safety with nutritional information.

The program also incorporates messages targeted to consumers about buying fresh, local products. Alison also has direct contact with industry groups. She puts on educational workshops, and is currently in the initial stages of planning a workshop on food safety for the produce sector.

Outside of work, Alison is the mother of two-year-old twins. Before having children, Alison spent a lot of energy on her involvement with horses. Now her time is focused on working full time and having a family, but she still manages to stay active by going for walks with her children and the family dog, a Mastiff named Dee-O-Gee.



Photo courtesy of Alison Speirs