



INFORMATION

Yukon Agriculture Branch Quarterly Bulletin

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MESSAGE FROM THE AGRICULTURE BRANCH

I sit here today, late in November, with the temperature dipping to -40° for the first time this winter and reflect on the past summer, the ups and downs different sectors of the agriculture industry experienced, and spend a little time looking forward to what's coming next.

The Fireweed Community Market continues to be a bright light for the industry providing a terrific venue for sales of Yukon grown and raised products. The market is providing a direct link between producers and consumers and the venue helps profile the freshness and quality available from Yukon farms. Producers get immediate feedback on what quantities customers want to buy, pricing and presentation. Consumers get to know where the products come from, how they are grown and all the good reasons to support local food production. Congratulations to Simone, Tom, Claire and Graham Rudge, "Farm Family of the Year 2006" who played a big role in the development of the Fireweed Community Market.

This summer's hay production seemed to be a little below average in terms of yield, although this usually means above average quality. A long fall and some frost free areas gave berry crops time to mature. Potatoes also benefited from the long fall as did grain crops that never received the heat units required to mature through the summer.

The mobile abattoir visited four local farms this fall providing slaughter services on-farm for the first time in the Yukon. We are pleased that despite some glitches and cold weather limitations the unit will contribute to food safety and retail market access.

Looking forward to 2007, the Branch will continue implementing changes under the 2006 Agriculture Policy. Results of the 2006 Census of Agriculture become available in May. We will begin work on a new Multi-Year Development Plan for the agriculture industry and government. It's a busy and exciting time to be part of a developing industry.

Season greetings from all the staff at the Agriculture Branch, and best wishes for a bountiful 2007.

Tony Hill
Director



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NORTHERN AGRICULTURE

NORTH OF 60° AGRICULTURE CONFERENCE & BANQUET:
WHAT LIES UNDERNEATH: UNDERSTANDING SOIL HEALTH

The 19th annual North of 60° Agriculture Conference was held November 4 at the Yukon Inn. Following a day spent listening to speakers from western Canada and Alaska discussing the principals of soil health, participants enjoyed a great Yukon grown banquet in the evening.

The conference started off with a quick introduction to Yukon soils, looking at the factors of soil formation and asking why soils are different depending on where you dig. Soils are different due to a combination of topography, parent material, climate, time, vegetation, and human influence.

Following the introduction, Dr. Stephen Sparrow provided very pertinent information on nitrogen and nutrient cycling in northern soils. His presentation provided a wealth of information from nitrogen fixation rates and green manuring to looking at the fate of urea fertilizer in the soil. One snippet from his presentation is that the conversion to ammonium is complete within a few days and that plant recovery of this fertilizer is about 60%.

Dr. Art Bomke followed up the discussion with a very detailed analogy comparing soil and soil testing to human health and going to see a doctor. The take home message is that it is important not only to soil test but also to have good interpretation of the soil test with meaningful data from the local region.

In the afternoon the discussion focused on soil organic matter. Dr. Sparrow detailed the importance of organic matter in the soil. There is an article on page six of this

newsletter with further discussion of this topic.

Gary Telford from the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration (PFRA) discussed the role PFRA has played in Canada and some of the effects of poor soil management.

The afternoon finished off with Ryan Davison from the National Water Supply Expansion Program. Details of this program are available online: http://www.agr.gc.ca/env/index_e.php?section=h2o&page=yt

After a full day of learning how to improve our soil to grow better crops, it was a treat to enjoy the "Yukon Grown" buffet at the evening banquet.

The foods for dinner were supplied by:

Bill and Barbara Drury of Circle D Ranch - Elk;

Jonathan Lucas of Icy Waters - Arctic Charr;

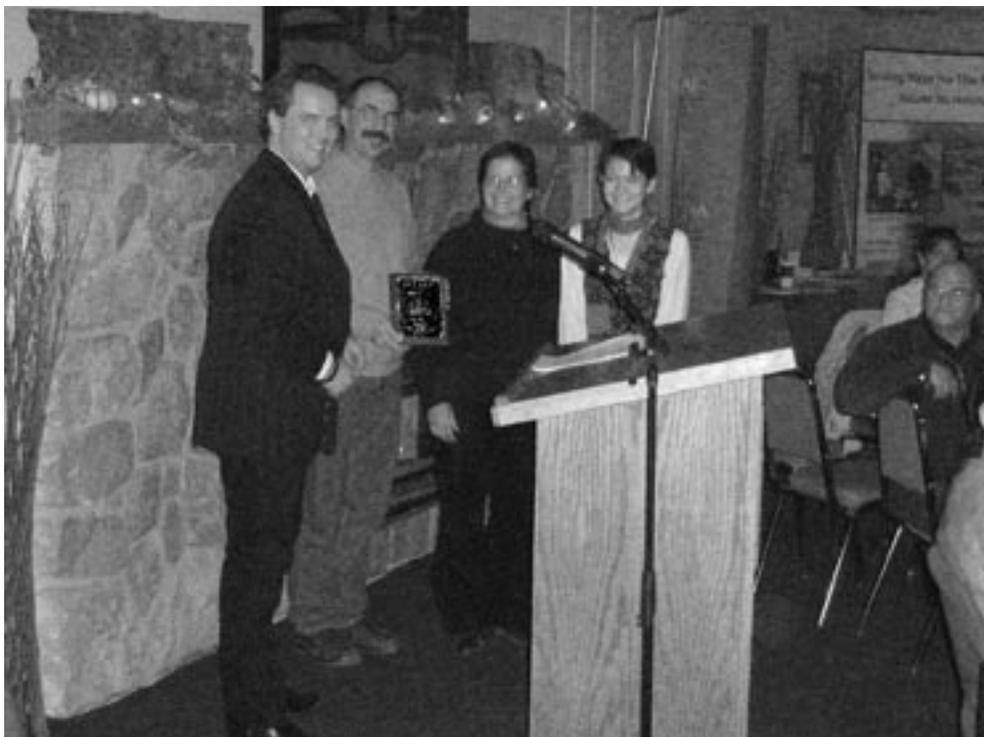
Roy Ness - Vegetables;

Steve and Bonnie MacKenzie-Grieve of Yukon Grain Farm - Potatoes; and

Denis Lacroix - Raspberries;

The berries were picked from the Agriculture Branch research plots. The berry harvest was only possible due to our troop of assistants. A special thank you to George Green and all the folks who helped pick those raspberries.

To top off the evening we had the presentation for the Farm Family of the Year, which was awarded by Minister Brad Cathers to the Rudge family.



Minister Cathers awarding the Farm Family of the Year plaque to the Rudge family

NORTHERN AGRICULTURE

AND THE FARM FAMILY OF THE YEAR IS ...

Tom and Simone Rudge (and Claire and Graham of course!)

Below is a reprint of their speech from the banquet which speaks to all our hearts in the agriculture sector:

We'd like to thank the Yukon Agriculture Branch for inviting us here tonight. To be recognized in this way is to be empowered. To feel that what we do, what we all do as farmers is important – a profession better than any other because of the enjoyment we get from seeing people enjoy the products of our labours.

We're relative newcomers to the farming community here and have benefited from the advice and help of many other farmers. We'd like to thank Mike Blumenschein for sharing his expertise and helping us develop our land so we could grow certified organic crops. Susan Ross and Brian Lendrum have shared their goat expertise and, on occasion, even their goats. Brian and Susan run the only commercial dairy in the Yukon producing several kinds of cheese as well as growing certified organic vegetables. Steve and Bonnie Mackenzie-Grieve proved it was possible to grow grain (as well as spectacular potatoes) in the Yukon and inspired us to try several new grains including triticale, hull-less barley, red spring wheat, red fife wheat, and kamut as well as rye and oats.

Many other farmers have been working hard to meet the Yukon's food and feed needs. Ralph and Norma Mease have been farming in Mayo for many years producing wonderful vegetables as well as supplying piglets and pork. Joan and Alan Norberg have been working to meet the huge demand for local vegetables, free-run eggs, chicken, pork and turkey.

We're at a tipping point where consumers are not only supporting, but demanding locally grown food. In the rest of Canada, there is growing concern over food security. In the Yukon, we have the opportunity to lead the way with industry, government, retail and consumer support. We have an incredible opportunity to create a sustainable food system right from field to plate. It doesn't take huge farms. At the farmers' market, some of the most impressive fresh vegetables came from Henning Hanson's backyard in Porter Creek. We need to encourage more growers, both large and small, to get their wonderful produce into the homes of Yukon families as well as our daycares and schools.

This event is one of the best ways to build community and to create a network of communication and sustainability. Many thanks to the Yukon Agricultural branch for hosting such a night that celebrates the growing of local products for people and their animals.

AGRICULTURE LAND UPDATE

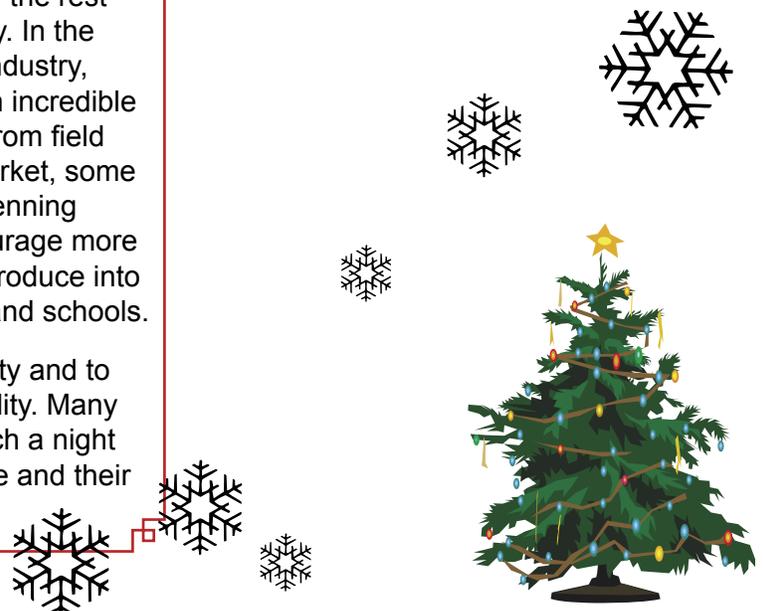
So far this year has been consistent with other years in terms of agriculture land dispositions.

Nine Agricultural Agreements for Sale were issued and signed for the period from January 1 to November 27, 2006. In total 396 hectares (979 acres) were issued with the average parcel size at 44 hectares (109 acres).

There are four pending agricultural dispositions; 182 hectares (450 acres) in total. These Agreements should be issued and signed later this year or early next year.

Records show that Yukon issues an average of 10 to 12 Agreements for Sale per year. This means every year, we have an average of 10 to 12 new agricultural development projects. The average parcel size over the years is approximately 40 hectares (99 acres).

Seven Agricultural Titles have been issued for the period from January 1 to November 27, 2006. In total 249 hectares (615 acres) were issued with an average parcel size of 36 hectares (89 acres).



NORTHERN AGRICULTURE

NEW REALITIES, NEW OPPORTUNITIES:

Gearing up for the next generation of agriculture and agri-food policy

The Canadian agriculture and agri-food industry is an integral part of the Canadian economy and an important contributor to the social fabric of Canada. The sector faces a variety of opportunities and pressures in a rapidly evolving world. Together with government, the agriculture and agri-food sector will be seeking out new directions for future success.

In 2003, the federal, provincial and territorial governments implemented the Agricultural Policy Framework (APF) to position Canada as the world leader in food safety and quality, innovation and environmentally responsible agriculture production.

Many elements of the APF expire in 2008 although positive momentum and many successful programs and initiatives have been built under the current Agricultural Policy Framework. Work is currently underway to transform and enhance the framework to make it more responsive and to ensure it provides an enduring foundation for profitability throughout the value chain.

Meanwhile, a number of new economic opportunities are emerging, such as economic growth in markets like China, Brazil and India, the growing bio-based fuels industry and the increase in health awareness among Canadians and global consumers.

Federal, provincial and territorial (FPT) governments are committed to working together, making



a concerted effort to address immediate needs and to establish a strong policy foundation that will ensure a competitive and profitable agriculture sector for years to come.

The time to build the next generation of agriculture and agri-food policy is now. The goal is to have the next generation in place by 2008.

Consulting Canadians

All Canadians will have the opportunity to participate in national consultation sessions in January and February 2007. The purpose is to spark public debate on the future of the agriculture and agri-food sector in Canada.

Beginning in January 2007, Canadians can participate in the consultations:

- 1) Via AAFC Online: www.agr.gc.ca/nextgen
- 2) By mailing responses to AAFC.
- 3) By attending a consultation event.

A full suite of materials including a discussion paper, guiding principles and economic backgrounders have been developed to help stimulate discussion and debate with industry and Canadians during the cross-country consultations. More details about the public consultations will be made available in the near future.

For information on how to participate in building the next generation of agriculture and agri-food policy, contact your provincial or territorial agriculture office, call 1 800 O-CANADA (1 800 622-6232), TTY 1 800 926-9105, or visit www.agr.gc.ca/nextgen.

TERRA MADRE 2006
SLOW FOOD CONFERENCE

by Joanne Jackson Johnson

Terra Madre 2006 is now past and fading into memory for a small delegation of Yukoners that included farmers, producers, a baker and a chef. The conference took place this past October in Turin, Italy in the Oval Lingotto, where speed-skating was held during the Olympic Games earlier this year. 6500 people from 150 countries attended - all small producers and chefs and researchers interested in sustainability. Many, but not all, of the farmers grow organically and many are engaged in maintaining the production of older varieties of plants and animals and methods of processing them.

In 2006, Terra Madre included 1000 chefs, who are the link between growers and consumers of food. In addition, the Slow Food event Salone del Gusto, took place simultaneously nearby.

Slow Food, an organization started in the 1980's in Italy, now claims 200,000 members worldwide. Its original mandate was to make the consumption of food a daily cultural event, slow and meaningful, helping to maintain family and societal links. Since then, Slow Food has expanded its mandate to a global concern for preserving biodiversity, local markets, and the limited resources of water and soil.

The five-day event included opening and closing ceremonies and three days of Earth Workshops. The theme this year was Good, Clean and Fair, referring to the quality of food, the methods of its production and the conditions of labour and remuneration for the producers.

The Earth Workshops addressed the themes in various ways. The sessions included marketing and economics, education, specific products such as



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rice, coffee, and root vegetables, as well as agroecology topics. There were also meetings scheduled for the delegates of each country or region. I decided to focus on soil health, water use, and genetically modified seeds and organisms. I also attended the meeting of Canadian delegates.

Two workshops interested me - "Healthy Soil" and one called "Water: available water, desired water." The workshop format included presentations from a variety of knowledgeable people interspersed with question periods. Each session lasted about two hours. Simultaneous translation was provided in five languages.

Giusto Giovannetti, Director of the Experimental Culture Centre in the Region of Aosta in Northern Italy, and a producer of a fertilizer containing soil microorganisms, stated "we have forgotten that plants grow in soil. We sterilize the soil, then feed plants chemicals as if they were a person on intravenous feeding." He emphasized the symbiotic nature of the plant/soil microbiology relationship. Both presenters on soil and on water quality focused on the need to act quickly to restore life to soils that have lost fertility by overuse of chemicals and excessive tilling.

Another pressing issue was the growing scarcity of water. According to some, within 10 to 15 years, one third of the Earth will be without potable or good quality water. Since agriculture is by far the heaviest user of water, the session gave examples of ways to conserve rainfall and protect aquifers. The term 'Peak Oil' is known to us, but it was suggested that we should be talking about 'Peak Soil' and 'Peak Water' as well.

Terra Madre is, in part, a political meeting, but no governments are represented as delegations, only individuals making presentations and "Food Communities". Carlo Petrini,

the founder of Slow Food, conceived of Terra Madre as a meeting that has no structure, allowing people to interact on their own, without political interference. An example this year was the meeting of several Arab countries with Israeli delegates, which began tentatively and then moved along with a symbolic dipping of bread into salt. An ancient Arab proverb states, "Ehna aklana eish we maleh ma' ba'd" ("By bread and salt we are united").

Terra Madre is a forum for producers, and in 2006, for chefs and universities. It captures the cooperative spirit that forms the basis for growing and producing food. Farmers have always saved and shared seed and are the repository for knowledge of the land that they work. Many presenters and farmers felt that large multinational corporations are now taking over that knowledge and selling it back to producers, making it impossible to save seeds, resulting in farmers being dependent on the corporation. Discussion about genetically modified (GM) seed and "terminator" technology concluded that these technologies did not produce more food or better food or cost farmers less, but made money for agribusiness. Many countries have banned the growing of GM crops and consumers in many parts of the world insist on food labelling to guarantee choices.

Some of the conference highlights include the great foods served to us at lunch every day; a huge spread of pasta, salads, meat and fish, as well as fruit and desserts; all ingredients from the region of Piemonte. On the last day, after the closing ceremony, Mary El Kerr, our Yukon chef, and I went to Salone del Gusto and had lunch at the Ligurian restaurant, one of many Italian regional restaurants set up on site. We ate some wonderful fried fish, mussels, sausages and some plain

white beans that were the best I have ever tasted. Afterwards we tasted a variety of balsamic vinegars.

The unstructured nature of the conference leaves adequate time to meet other delegates informally and to look around Turin's markets. Most of the Yukon delegation along with some other Canadians, Americans and Venezuelans, were staying in Susa, a small town northwest of Turin, in the mountains. Among others, I met two Canadian food writers and gave them Fireweed Market cookbooks. I also had time to talk to Ron and Sylvia Hamilton, from the Camrose area, who had sold me chicken feed supplements last year, and some interesting bison farmers from Alberta. The time that was set aside to make these connections is the essence of slow food.

Mary El Kerr recently wrote in her report to Slow Food "I realized that this style of eating is a part of the culture in Italy. Each night over delicious food we discussed our businesses, our problems with supply, and costs of good food. Through this process many connections were made in ways we as processors of food can help farmers, the economy and our own cultural identity in Canada."

The Yukon delegation - Suat Tuzlak, Shiela Alexandrovich, Berwyn Larson, Sylvia Frisch, Mike King, Mary El Kerr, Barb Buyck and Joanne Jackson Johnson wishes to thank ACAAF for funding their attendance.



Agroecology session at the conference

SCIENCE & RESEARCH

SOIL HEALTH:

Soil testing and organic matter

Soil health is an indicator of environmental health and like human health, provides an overall picture of the condition of many properties and processes. The terms soil health and soil quality can be used interchangeably.

“Soil health or quality is the soil’s fitness to support crop growth without resulting in soil degradation or otherwise harming the environment.” (Acton and Gregorich, *The Health of our Soils: Towards Sustainable Agriculture in Canada*)

Soil quality indicators are properties, functions, or conditions that point to a soil’s general health. These factors may be directly related to the soil, or they may be related to something that is affected by the soil, such as crops and water.

Chemical properties:

- Soil acidity (pH)
- Ability to absorb chemical compounds
- Nutrient exchange capacity
- Salt content
- Amount and type of organic matter

Physical Properties:

- Size and arrangement of macropores
- Texture
- Aggregate stability
- Capacity to accept and store water

Soil biological properties:

- Amount and type of organic matter
- Number, type, and functions of soil microbes and invertebrates
- Specific respiratory activity
- Enzyme activity

In order to assess the soil properties we need to first measure the soil through soil testing to provide a

snapshot of the soil condition. Soil health can also be peripherally examined through the growth, disease resistance, composition and colouration of the vegetation.

Soil health deteriorates mainly through erosion by wind and water, loss of organic matter, breakdown of soil structure, salinization, and chemical contamination. Through continued monitoring we can maintain the health of the soil and avoid long term soil erosion.

One of the important indicators measured during soil analysis is the soil organic matter.

Soil organic matter attributes:

- Storehouse of nutrients (slowly released, thus not easily lost).
- Improves soil structure
- Increases cation exchange capacity
- Increase water holding capacity
- Can serve as both source and sink for C, thus very important in global C cycle

Maintaining or conserving organic matter and adding, and thus increasing, organic matter in soil is important in all field systems.

Ways to conserve soil organic matter:

- Reduce or prevent soil erosion
- Reduce disturbance (such as tillage which tends to increase decomposition rate as well as erosion)

Ways to add organic matter to soil:

- Grow crops that produce lots of biomass, especially roots
- Return crop residues to the soil
- Add organic amendments (such as manure or compost)

CROP CALCULATORS

The Alberta Agriculture Ropin’ The Web online site is a tremendous resource. Useful decision-making tools available through this site include farm calculators for herbicide selection, bushel weight conversion, forage seed mixtures, farm machinery ownership costs, manure composting, swath grazing, and fertilizer management.

To have a look online visit:

<http://www.agric.gov.ab.ca/app19/calc/index.jsp?type=Crop>.

If you have any questions about these resources please feel free to call Matt 393-7410.

NITROGEN IN THE NORTH

Understanding the nitrogen needs of your crop, and not overapplying fertilizers reduces the impact on your wallet and the environment. Sources of nitrogen include: compost, conventional and organic fertilizers, manures, rain and atmospheric deposition, crop residues, animal wastes, and soil bacteria. Nitrogen is expensive to apply at the rates needed for intensive crop production making proper management a priority. Tailoring your nitrogen needs is best started by a simple soil test.

One of the frequently asked questions about nitrogen is determining the amount of nitrogen lost through leaching. Dr. Steve Sparrow has worked in Alaska on a number of research projects to understand nitrogen in the north. According to studies by Dr. Sparrow about 10% of the surface applied urea leached (in the form of nitrate) to 30-48 cm (12-18 inches) below the surface. The amount of nitrate below 48 cm was negligible. In most circumstances leaching will not be a problem in the semi-arid climatic conditions that we have in the Yukon.

TIPS & TRICKS

TIPS TO MAKE THE BEST USE OF YOUR WINTER FEED

Quality and quantity of livestock feeds for the winter are both equally important. However, all too often producers measure their winter-feeding program by the pounds of feed delivered to the animal. Types of feed ingredients, method of harvest, dry matter intake (DMI), and weather conditions all affect how well cattle will perform over the winter. Here are a few tips on cattle nutrition and feeding that can help you build the best ration and feeding system for your herd.

1. Balance Rations and Test Water- test feed ingredients at a minimum, for moisture, protein, energy, Ca and P. Silage with a pH over 5.2 doesn't keep very long so it needs testing too. Deficient protein and energy result in low birth weights or weak calves and poor milking cows. Excess protein and energy are expensive and wasted. Feed for the requirements of the cattle, not how much they will eat.

2. Estimate Feed Intake- feed intake will be dependent on feed quality and animal size and performance. Heavily pregnant animals cannot eat as much as dry or early pregnancy cattle. Older cattle eat more per unit body weight than younger cattle. DMI, as a per cent of body weight, can vary from 1.5% on straws to 2.75% on quality alfalfa hay. Cold stress on cattle may increase dry matter intake because it increases rate of passage.

3. Estimate and Adjust for Feed Waste- feed type and delivery method affects what and how much is wasted. The finer material may be the higher quality, higher protein portion of the feed. Hay and

greenfeed typically have a feeding waste of 15-30%. Grain and pellets have a waste factor of about 5%.

4. Limit Feed Cattle- when mature cows are not under cold stress, limiting feed can extend feed supplies. Rumen capacity will adjust to the amount of roughage offered in a ration. Focus on meeting the nutrient requirements of the animals.

5. Put Condition on Cattle Before High Demands of Pregnancy- the high nutritional demands of late pregnancy make it difficult to put weight on thin cows. Feed intake of lactating cows is 30-50% higher than pregnant cows. Feed cows to gain weight when it is cheapest (fall weather) and when they are not heavy in pregnancy.

6. If Cold Stressed, Feed Cattle Later in the Day- some research suggests late afternoon feeding makes more heat available to them during and after digestion when they need it most. The heat increment of feeding will then be highest closer to the coldest part of the day.

7. Be Aware of Mineral Imbalances When Feeding Cereal Crops- winter tetany can be a problem if feeding only annual cereal crops (greenfeed, silages or straw). It mimics milk fever in symptoms. Supplemental minerals are cheaper in the long run than treating downer cows or lameness due to mineral imbalances. Supplement extra calcium and or magnesium to offset effects of high potassium in annual cereal roughages.

8. Don't Change Ration Ingredients Too Abruptly- high concentrate rations should be stepped up by no more than half

pound per head per day.

9. Test for Nitrates- if feeds are suspicious (frosted greenfeed, heavily fertilized or manured annual cereal crops, or heated greenfeed bales) test for nitrates. Greenfeed bales low in nitrates can be dangerously high in nitrites if they heat. Nitrate conversion to nitrite can be deadly.

10. Feed Heated Bales Before They Mold- if not high in nitrates, feed heated bales early. Heated bales have less available protein and energy (protein requirements increase as the fetus grows in the uterus). Match the quality of the feed to the cattle requirements. With time and changes in weather, molds can develop and increase. Mold can be just as harmful if inhaled as it is if digested.

11. Don't Use Snow as a Water Source for First and Second Calf Heifers- if feeding poor quality roughages to breeding females under three years of age, provide fresh water. First and second calf heifers are still growing, plus maintaining a pregnancy, so protein and energy requirements are higher than for mature cattle. Snow is acceptable as a water source for mature cows and young cattle in good condition. Snow needs to be clean and not ice packed to be best utilized.

12. Convenience Feeds May Not Be Convenient for Your Wallet- protein is an expensive nutrient to supplement. If additional protein is not needed in the ration, certain products with protein, in addition to minerals and vitamins, will be more expensive than supplementing only the needed nutrients.

*Adapted from: Agriprofit\$
Author: Dr. Susan Markus*

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

THERE HAS BEEN INTEREST IN AN INTRODUCTORY BEE COURSE FOR ALL BEELOVERS
Please contact Matt Ball at 393-7410 or email matthew.ball@gov.yk.ca if you are interested.

MASTERGARDENER COURSE has been cancelled this winter. We will be sure to run the course next winter.

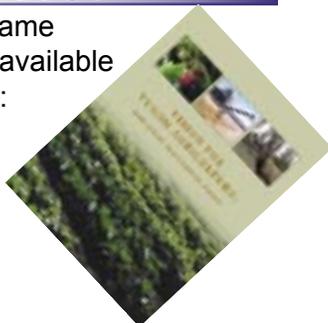
CHRISTMAS TIME!
It is always good to buy local, especially at Christmas.

NEW AGRICULTURE POLICY

The new 2006 Agriculture Policy became effective April 2006. Copies are now available from the Agriculture Branch or online:
http://www.emr.gov.yk.ca/pdf/ag_policy_2006.pdf

Some of the highlights include:

- Improved marketing of the Yukon agriculture industry and its products;
- Support of increased value-added agricultural production and commitment to continue making new land available for agricultural development;
- A new agricultural land pricing formula, where every dollar of approved development work will offset the land purchase price by a dollar;
- Continued cooperation with the Government of Canada to deliver industry development programs and the Agricultural Policy Framework; and,
- Commitment to advance planning for agricultural land development.



CLASSIFIEDS

Elk Meat For Sale

25 or 50 lb packages with lean burger, prime rib, t-bone, ribs, etc. Low fat, low cholesterol and high protein. Ford Elk Farms Ltd 633-4342

Velvet Antler For Sale

30 or 100 capsule bottles. Natural and healthy. Ford Elk Farms Ltd 633-4342

Pheasants For Sale

A variety of young and mature very colourful exotics. Easy to raise and winter hardy. Call Claude Dulac at 867-634-2512 in Haines Junction for more information.

Great Green Growers Cooperative

There's a new concept in farming coming to the Yukon this winter. On the horizon is a community, cooperative based farming project using privately held farm land to contribute to local food security and to make an affordable land option for farmers looking for a land in the Yukon. For more information please contact Peter Coates at 668-4630.

Yukon Gardener's Manual is available at the Agriculture Branch for \$20 + GST. Used for the Master Gardener Course offered by the Agriculture Branch, this manual includes chapters on botany, soils, outdoor vegetable gardening, lawn and ground covers, woody perennials, flowering plants, greenhouse growing, pests and diseases. A great gift idea for green (or black) thumbs this Christmas.

InFARMation is...

A Government of Yukon newsletter published by the Agriculture Branch of the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources. If you would like to add or remove your name from the newsletter mailing list, comment on an article, or contribute a story, please feel free to contact us.

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Online: www.emr.gov.yk.ca/agriculture