

INFARMATION

Yukon Agriculture Branch Quarterly Bulletin
Spring 2012
Volume 25 Issue 1

25 YEARS FOR THE NEWSLETTER. MESSAGE FROM THE AGRICULTURE BRANCH

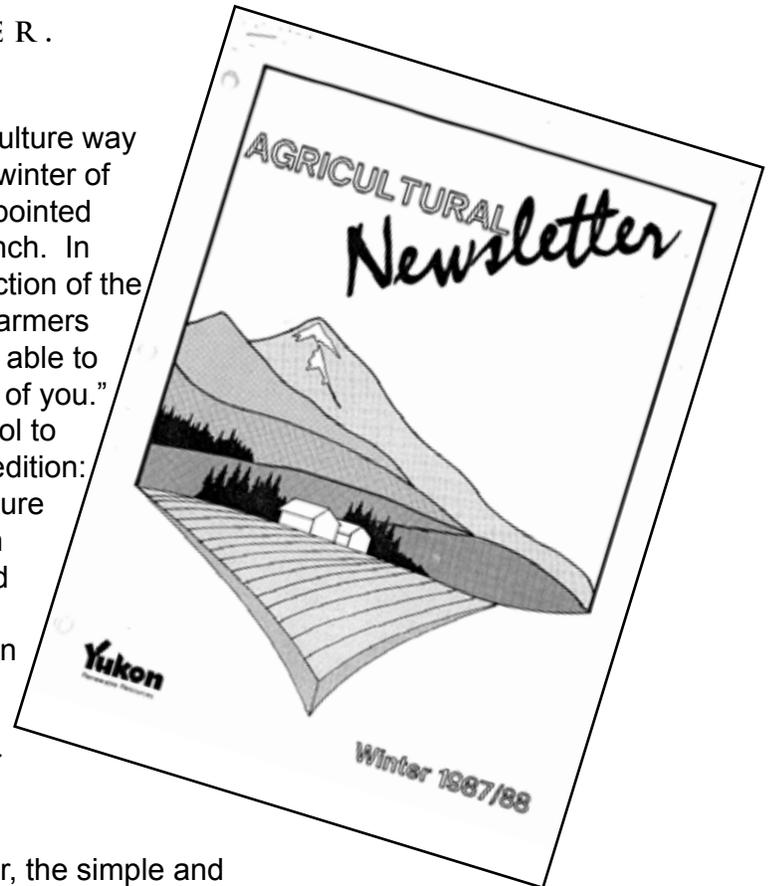
Wow... 25 years! What was happening in Yukon agriculture way back when? The first newsletter was published in the winter of 1987-88, an initiative of Dave Beckman, the newly appointed director of the recently created (1986) Agriculture Branch. In Dave's words from the first edition: "...the primary function of the Agriculture Branch is to offer an extension service to farmers and to the industry. It is hoped that our Branch will be able to provide a very worthwhile and reliable service to each of you." The newsletter was developed as a communication tool to help provide extension services, as stated in the first edition: "Articles will deal with the various services the Agriculture Branch has to offer as well as technical information on various types of agriculture productions. Also included will be features on some of the latest findings in research and development which are relevant to Yukon conditions."

The primary focus of today's editions of the newsletter has not changed.

Although the first editions were simply titled Newsletter, the simple and nifty change to include farm in the InFARMation title was done in the third edition, and has become almost a trademark of the newsletter today. The early editions were compiled and edited by Margaret Ames, Crops Demonstrator, a position that evolved to become the Extension Agrologist position over time. Similar to the Agriculture Branch, the newsletter has seen many changes over the years, to keep it fresh and to move with the changes in technology. Today, many subscribers receive the newsletter via email or access it on the Branch website agriculture.gov.yk.ca. Publishing in colour used to be unheard of due to excessive cost, but now it's the norm on the internet.

The second issue of the newsletter highlighted all the policies and legislation the Agriculture Branch was working on to enable a growing industry. A new agriculture policy was under development, a grazing policy, meat and slaughterhouse regulations and a game farming policy were in the works. Fast forward 25 years and we are updating those policies and regulations to meet the needs of the next generation of Yukon farmers.

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25 YEARS FOR THE NEWSLETTER CONT...

The development of a government/industry advisory group was announced in 1988 with representatives from the Dawson, Mayo and Whitehorse chapters of the Yukon Livestock and Agricultural Association (YAA). Today, we have the Agriculture Industry Advisory Committee with industry representatives from the Yukon Agriculture Association (including Ralph Mease, still the Mayo YAA representative 25 years later), Growers of Organic Food Yukon, the Yukon Game Growers and the Fireweed Community Market Society. The industry has matured in some areas and is still developing in others, adapting to changes in the market and stakeholder expectations.

Later this year, the Agriculture Branch will be celebrating 25 years at the annual North of 60° Agriculture Conference and Banquet and with any luck we will be able to bring a few guests in from the early days to help us celebrate. As for the future, I hope you continue to enjoy the InFARMation newsletter and find the agriculture extension information useful and applicable to farming in Yukon.

Tony Hill
Director, Agriculture Branch

YUKON AGRICULTURE 2020 VISIONING WORKSHOP

An agriculture visioning workshop was held at the Old Firehall, January 31, 2012 in Whitehorse with participation from governments, associations and individuals with experience in the Growing Forward programming. The purpose was to develop a vision of what Yukoners would like Yukon agriculture to look like 10-15 years from now and the programming we need to get us there.

Visions revolved around increasing production sustainably and profitably, increasing food security (access to local foods), access to infrastructure for inspection and processing, greater education and knowledge transfer and hopes for increasing land utilization and availability. To a lesser degree, distribution, research and legislative changes were envisioned.

The discussion was broken down by sectors, scale and then age in order to examine common themes.

Market gardeners were concerned about markets, retail outlets, storage and labour. Hay producers were concerned about building new markets and education on existing products. Livestock producers were concerned about biodiversity in forages and pasture, access to local organic feeds and development of a multi-use facility for better utilization of the mobile abattoir. Community garden representatives were concerned about demonstration gardens and access to fertile lands.

Small operations were concerned about sustainability, self-sufficiency and community. Medium and large operations were concerned with marketing and production. Large operations were concerned about livestock processing infrastructure and having more successful operations at the large scale. All operations regardless of size highlighted education both within the industry and with the public.

Differentiating the group by age highlighted the succession dilemma, wherein the value of successful farms with associated land, infrastructure and equipment eclipses the ability of a typical new entrant to finance the business solely on the farm receipts. One suggestion was the possibility of a land trust or regime to preserve land in agriculture. Those grouped in the 40-50 year category discussed changing consumer behaviours, changing climate and uncertainties providing additional challenges for new and existing farmers. The younger group was concerned with the lack of available, affordable land and the location of land. Options for reducing costs were discussed such as cooperative farm structures. Education and knowledge exchange was an issue across all the age ranges.

The workshop raised some interesting concepts including the idea of an incubator farm and Ag-Net. The incubator farm concept is a place where people can start up a small agriculture venture, growing on a ¼ acre of land and have a supported learning environment. An incubator farm provides an avenue for knowledge transfer and bridges the gap between the exiting farmers with years of accumulated knowledge and new farmers with limited knowledge. The other great idea was the development of an online Ag-Net, this online community of farmers and gardeners could be used to share information, ask questions, or for buy and sell.

For a full copy of the materials please contact the Agriculture Branch.

DOES CHANGE BRING OPPORTUNITY?

It is no surprise that things are changing. The World economy, for one, is changing fast. Gold and oil prices are the usual indicators of the state of the economy, but now we are seeing the price of food make a change, and become a concern for Canadians.

According to the latest Consumer Price Index from Statistics Canada, food prices rose 4.2% on a year-over-year basis in January following a 4.4% increase in December. In January 2012, consumers paid 4.9% more for food purchased from stores and 2.8% more for food purchased from restaurants compared with January 2011. That is roughly \$5 more at the grocery store for every \$100 spent. With the exception of food and energy all other consumer prices have increased by only 1.6% in the 12 months leading up to January.

The 4.9% rise in food prices from stores is highlighted in above average increases for meat, bread and fresh vegetables. Consumers paid 6.5% more for meat, 9.9% for bread and 8.3% for fresh vegetables.

The increase in awareness of food cost is due to the reality that food makes up approximately 16% of Yukon household expenditures after taxes, according to the 2009 Statistics Canada average household expenditures. Only shelter (27%) and transportation (18%) make up more of a household's expenditures.

Statistics Canada does not identify why consumers are seeing these increases. There are obvious drivers such as increased production, processing and shipping costs and there is also the change in demand for agriculture products. The growing Asian economy and

the competition on grains for fuel are increasing demand in some sectors.

This upward price trend in food creates an opportunity for the Yukon agriculture industry and an environment where prices are more in line with Yukon production costs. Because farmers produce to be part of a community, higher food costs are not about getting more money from Yukon families, but about having food prices at a level that supports a healthy and sustainable agriculture industry.

There also appears to be a change in the attitude of consumers, both because of the 'buy local' campaigns and because of increasing food costs. A higher food price contributes to consumer awareness about production, and helps guide food purchasing decisions, hopefully more towards local products.

How do we know that consumer awareness is changing? According to an American Express Study released January 27, 2011 Canadians are becoming more cost-conscious and quality-driven, and are adopting a 'shop local' ethos. The study identifies four consumer trends for 2011 and beyond, that are shaping Canadian consumer spending. The trends were identified based on a combination of consumer survey data, expert interviews and qualitative research. These trends include:

1. **SLEDS** (Supporting Local Economies through Direct Spending)
2. **V-tailing** (Value retailing)
3. **SMUGS** (Socially-Mobile Ultra-Green Seniors)
4. **Re(n)tail** (cost-conscious young consumer)

These consumer trends mark a change towards a more conscious consumer; one who supports local agriculture. Specifically SLEDS,

identified as urban consumers, are shifting their habits towards their rural neighbours, seeking more local, home-grown and community focused interaction, both in person and online. SLEDS buy to be part of their local community and are shopping for more sustainable products that protect the environment.

The local Yukon production link to the other trends is not as direct, but it is evident that more conscious spending is taking place with each of the trends. Re(n)tail, are the cost-conscious young consumers aged 18-34 who were brought up in an era of online sharing and collaboration. This group is now choosing to downsize and simplify their possessions, and prefers to experience products and services rather than own them.

SMUGS, are Canada's 55 to 64 year old demographic that are redefining traditional notions of the baby boomer generation. These seniors value individual freedom and they seek luxury and new experiences. The V-tailing Canadians are shopping less, and are choosing products that represent value for money. The V-tailing group expects value from brands that align with their own desire for simplicity and ethical living.

With increasing sales of farm gate foods, increasing visibility of local food at the grocery store, and the adding of a farmers market in Mayo, consumers are supporting local, sustainable foods. For Yukon Ag this shift in prices and consumer demand is an opportunity to harness.

To find the online version of the American Express news release "Cost-conscious and quality-driven Canadians adopt a 'shop local' ethos" go to: emr.ca/infarm01.

YUKON PRODUCER PROFILE

HIGHLIGHTING PRODUCERS AND THEIR AGRI-BUSINESSES

This column is an opportunity to introduce readers to farm operations in Yukon. This segment features Yukon's amazing producers, farm products and how farmers are overcoming some of our climate, production and market obstacles. This edition of the Yukon Producer Profile presents:

PELLY RIVER RANCH

This multi-generational farm, located on the banks of the Pelly River, just upstream from the confluence of the Yukon and Pelly rivers, is more than just a ranch. Chatting with Dale and Hugh Bradley, hearing them talk about the opportunities and challenges of farming today and also reflecting back on the many events and changes they have seen, you can't help but be caught up in their pride for what they grow and marvel at the history this farm has seen.

The Bradley's have been on the Pelly River Ranch farm since 1954 when Hugh with his brother Dick and a few friends bought the farm. They purchased it from J.C. Wilkerson, but the farm was first worked back in 1901 by Edward Meard, who was stationed at Fort Selkirk as a telegraph operator. This is the longest continually run family farm in Yukon. Today the farm is a team effort with 2nd generation Dale Bradley taking on more and more of the work, with Hugh acting as the mentor.

Over coffee, Hugh talked about the challenges they faced back in 1954, specifically moving their animals north for their first year. It took Hugh and his partners 18 days to bring their herd of animals from Edmonton to the ranch. Hugh



reminisces about having the road close just as they were starting the trip, blowing tires and busting rims on the rough highway, having to wait in Carmacks and Pelly for the ferry to be put in and finally having to walk the 50 plus km along the old pack trail down to the farm, while his brother Dick was at the farm breaking and planting the crop for their first growing season.

Hugh smiles while recounting this story. They had one bull; four yearling Herefords; one Holstein calf; and one Hereford Guernsey cross. The animals from the wide-open prairies were not familiar with all the trees, and needed a little coaxing to head down the trail and more than a little coaxing to cross the creeks. Hugh recalls his 22nd birthday, which occurred on the last leg of this move with partner Buck Godwin. The birthday was celebrated with a small, but fresh grayling, some milk from the cow, bacon, and pancake mix, probably the closest thing that they had to a birthday cake.

Although they still have some of the original genetics from the animals they brought up 58 years ago, a lot has changed on the farm since the Bradley's started farming on the Pelly River. Their herd is a lot

bigger; they do not milk anymore; they have added a silage bunker to store hay; they have a lot more equipment; market access is a lot easier, with road access to Pelly and they also have internet. Even with these changes they still rely heavily on community support. They acknowledge that their relationship with Pelly and Carmacks has contributed to their success, but feel they are capable of growing and raising more if they could figure out an easier way to market their beef and veggies to Whitehorse consumers.

Dale gives examples of marketing his farm gate beef, and of all the time spent on the phone or computer rounding up customers, sometimes to lose a sale because of a successful moose hunt. Even after the sales are made, he still has to go through the lengthy process of slaughter, hanging, cutting and delivering the beef. Dale feels his time could be better spent on production if he had an outlet closer to Whitehorse that was capable of finishing and slaughtering the beef for the Whitehorse market. Dale senses Whitehorse is an opportunity, because of growing demand for local sustainable foods.

Through his years of experience and exploring opportunities he feels there are margins he can work with. He just needs to find a way to get it to market.

Pelly River Ranch:

- **Owners:** Dale and Sue Bradley, Hugh and Wenda Bradley
- **Years in business:** 58
- **Distance to Whitehorse:** 350 km
- **Distance to Pelly:** 52 km
- **Markets serviced:** Carmacks, Pelly and Whitehorse
- **Operation:** Livestock, eggs, potatoes, and market garden vegetables

Lessons Learned:

- **Location helps.** Farming in one of the warmer locations in Yukon (during the summer months) prolongs the growing season, and provides improved growth for maturing crops.
- **Diversification and the ability to adapt.** By diversifying their operation and learning from past experiences, they have adopted management practices that work for their operation.
- **Timing to market.** There are opportunities that can be had or lost depending on when you can supply.
- **Local sustainable sells.** Consumers want to know how we raise our animals and what inputs we use on the farm. Our customers want to support local sustainable agriculture practices, that's why they buy from us.

Pelly River Ranch has a rich history of growing. With over 50 years of farming there is no better example of a sustainable farm in Yukon. They work with the land and use the fertilizer generated from their animals to replenish the fields. It is easy to understand why the community continues to support Pelly River Ranch.

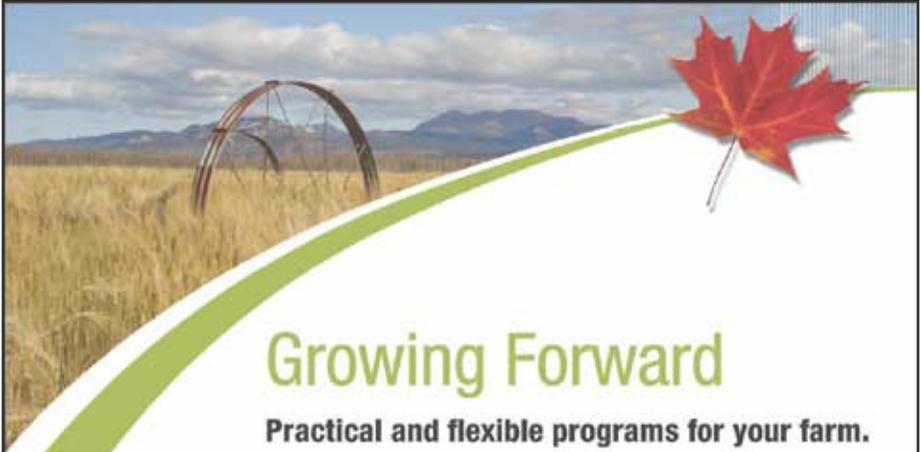
WHAT DO YOU RAISE, GROW OR PROCESS? MINISTERS OF AGRICULTURE CONFERENCE, SEPTEMBER 2012

In mid-September, Yukon is hosting the Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers and Deputy Ministers of Agriculture Conference in Whitehorse. This is an annual face-to-face meeting with Agriculture Ministers from across the country. It is an opportunity for discussion on issues facing the agriculture and agri-food industry and collaboration on how to address these issues.

During the conference, the Agriculture Branch will be hosting two events; an opening reception and the Ministers Banquet, both of which are opportunities to showcase Yukon Grown foods (approximately 150 to 200 people at each event). To provide the widest possible range of Yukon foods for the chefs to use, we are seeking information from farmers about the products they would be interested in producing for these events and the prices they expect to charge.

Once the Agriculture Branch has collected this information, it can be made available to the chefs, who have yet to be identified. For most items, the chef would then contact the farms directly to discuss amount and type of product required, and delivery. If an abattoir is required for a livestock product, this service may be made available with advance notice.

To be considered, please respond by April 30, 2012, Attention Kevin Bowers by email, fax, or mail with your information. kevin.bowers@gov.yk.ca , 867-393-6222 or Agriculture Branch (K320A) Energy, Mines & Resources, Box 2703 Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 2C6



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IS IT TIME TO REJUVENATE OR RENOVATE YOUR FIELD?

Is your pasture or hay field becoming less productive? There are two basic approaches to restoring established fields to a productive state:

- rejuvenation and;
- renovation.

What is the difference?

Rejuvenation of a field basically involves increasing the health and fertility of the field; whereas, renovating a field also involves re-establishment.

How do you determine whether you rejuvenate or renovate?

First, determine why the field is performing poorly. Look for:

- signs of poor fertility;
- over-use or neglect;
- weeds;
- the amount and distribution of productive forages;
- the amount of unproductive grasses;
- bare spots;
- thinness or thickness of the sod.

If productivity is poor because of the first three signs, rejuvenation is a suitable option. If the sod is thin or full of bare patches, with little in the way of productive grasses or legumes, renovating would be a better choice. Also, you should determine your production goals for the field and how quickly the field must be improved. In general, rejuvenation is quicker, but if your long-term management strategy is to add legumes to the field or change your forage mix, you may want to renovate.

REJUVENATION

Field rejuvenation involves getting the key nutrients back into the soils to increase fertility and involves controlling grazing or haying practices to encourage growth.

This approach recognizes that the soil has become deficient in the nutrients required to support the growth of productive plants.

The first step in rejuvenating a field is taking a soil test to determine the nutritional state of the soil. Contact the Agriculture Branch Agrologist for assistance with soil testing and advice on how to fertilize the field. Applying phosphorus and potassium can increase the amount of forage produced, but it is the application of nitrogen that brings about the largest changes. Nitrogen additions reduce moss, depress the growth of poor-producing grasses and stimulate the growth of productive grasses.

Once a field has been rejuvenated, grazing management or haying practices are key to protecting and fostering the growth of desirable plants.

RENOVATION

Renovation is very similar to establishment of the field, minus initial breaking and working of the soil. You may ask yourself, wouldn't it be easier and more effective to break the field and re-seed?

The key reason for adopting a renovation strategy on your field is the conservation of the organic material that has been developed on the field. Breaking the field or

cultivation generally results in the loss of organic matter. Cultivation increases the rate of decomposition, which uses up nutrients, and results in the loss of fertility.

Adopting management practices that use fertilizers and/or manure and reduced tillage can increase organic matter in Yukon soils. Working with your current organic matter contributes to improved soil physical properties (e.g., tilth, aggregation, moisture holding capacity and resistance to erosion), and increasing soil organic matter will generally result in increased soil productivity.

There are a few factors that contribute to the success of renovating, including:

- selecting forage species adapted to the growing conditions in the field;
- the intended method of renovation and future pasture management;
- preparation of the field;
- seeding at an appropriate time of year;
- moisture conditions at, and following, seeding;
- soil fertility at, and following, seeding and;
- control of competition from the existing plants.

Established plants have all the advantages in renovated pastures.



Photo: YAA no till drill. This drill is available for rent, contact YAA for more info visit the YAA website at yukonag.ca or contact YAA at 867-668-6864.

New seedlings must be able to survive the competition with old plants for light, moisture, space and soil nutrients. Strategies to improve the ability of new plants to compete and establish include:

Prior to seeding

- Cut or graze the area heavily, to reduce competition with existing plants.
- Control problem weeds.
- Take soil tests to determine fertilizer requirements.

At establishment and during development

- Suppress the old sod growth, keep old growth height to a minimum to improve the availability of light for new plants. Cut, graze or spray when old growth reaches 5–10 cm.
- If using legumes, inoculate seeds just before seeding.
- Seed as early as possible in spring. Make sure the seed is placed at the right depth. If conditions are dry, plant closer to 1.5 cm, than 0.5 cm.
- Fertilize according to need.
- Use controlled grazing management, such as rotational grazing to encourage and protect new seeding.

Managing moisture during renovation is key for new plants. Due to small root systems, new seedlings are vulnerable to water stress. Old plants with larger roots are able to access a larger soil area for available moisture. Renovating in early spring offers a good opportunity to capture adequate moisture conditions, but only provides a short window because of the cooler spring soil temperatures. Low soil temperatures during germination and establishment can reduce plant density, nodulation and nitrogen fixation, and seedling growth rates. A longer window for plant establishment occurs in late

summer, when soil temperatures are warmer and August rains arrive. The challenge with renovating in August is the weather, getting enough rain and also enough growth before the first killing frost, is critical for winter survival.

SEEDING INTO THE SOD

Sod seeding has several advantages over conventional seeding because most of the soil surface remains undisturbed; therefore, few annual weeds germinate and moisture loss from the ground is kept to a minimum. You can use modified grain drills (no till drills) or specially designed sod

seeders to place seed into the soil of an existing field. This method of renovation has the highest chance of success, as the seed can be placed at the proper depth. The seed can then readily absorb soil moisture for germination.

Yukon Agricultural Association (YAA) has a few of pieces of rental equipment that may help you with renovating your field, including a brush mower, no till drill, manure spreader and an aerator coupled with a broadcast seeder. For more information visit the YAA website at yukonag.ca or contact YAA at 867-668-6864.

THE CORNER L.O.T. (LAND, OPPORTUNITIES & TIDBITS): FEATURING INFORMATION ABOUT AGRICULTURE LANDS.

In 2011, the Agriculture Branch issued nine agricultural agreements for sale on 380.77 ha of new lands.

- The average parcel size in 2011 was 42.31 ha.
- The average parcel size based on the data of the last seven years (2005 to 2011) was 40.19 ha.

Summary of Land Sales for the Agriculture Program 1982 to January 2012:

- To December 2011: 12,983ha (32,069 acres), 325 titles.
- Total lands sold for agriculture (titled land plus agreement for sales): 15,023ha (37,107 acres).
- Land dispositions are mostly in the Whitehorse area with over seventy per cent of agriculture lands within 60 kilometers of the city.

In the fall of 2011 the Agriculture Branch released phase II of the planned agriculture land sales in the Haines Junction agriculture subdivision at Marshall Creek. These lots were offered using a new application process that requires the development of a thorough business plan as part of the detailed Farm Development Plan. Two of the five lots were sold based on this new application process and the three remaining lots were re-advertised and offered again this winter. Application for the remaining lots closed March 30 at 4 p.m. The lots will be offered for sale to the successful applicants by April 20, 2012 following the evaluation and scoring of the applications.

There are currently a number of planned agriculture areas being investigated, including a couple close to Whitehorse. The timelines for planned agriculture land are highly variable depending on the challenges presented in developing these lots. The lots in the communities will come on line as demand occurs. All planned agriculture land sales are well advertised.

For more information on agriculture land, contact David Murray at david.murray@gov.yk.ca, visit agriculture.gov.yk.ca or phone 1-800-661-0408 ext. 3699.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

PREMISES REGISTRATION UPDATE

Yukon livestock producers should take note that livestock movement reporting will begin in 2012 for the hog and cattle sectors. What this means for Yukon producers planning to import either of these species is that they may be required to provide a Premises Registration number to the exporting farm before animals are moved. A registration number for your premises is available by contacting the Agriculture Branch. This number must be obtained prior to importation. To apply, please contact the Agriculture Branch, contact information available in bottom right corner of this page.

DAWSON COMMUNITY FOOD SURVEY AND MARKET EXPANSION STRATEGY

Dawson's Conservation Klondike Society conducted a food survey with funding from the Canadian Agricultural Adaptation Program. The objective of the survey was to develop a clearer understanding of the current buying practices and attitudes towards local foods in the Klondike. This information was used to develop a market expansion strategy. Although the information in the food survey and market expansion is not intended as advice, or for other Yukon markets, the information collected is valuable and can provide insight for Yukon producers. To find an online copy of the full report go to emr.ca/infarm02.

SHORTENING THE WAY TO ONLINE RESOURCES

You may have noticed a couple web addresses in this issue using emr.ca/infarmXX. We've begun to shorten hard-to-type links to outside resources in order to make it easier to find the information we think you will value. You will continue to see these short web links in upcoming issues – be sure to check them out, there's lots of great information to be found.

LAND LINK OPPORTUNITY

The Yukon Agriculture Land Link is an opportunity to connect landowners and new farmers looking for land.

The Land Link program recently enrolled a property owner with five acres available for interested land seekers. This property is close to Whitehorse, located off the Hotsprings Road and maybe the ideal location for a new farmer.

For the landowners contact information or interested landowners wanting to register land, please contact the Agriculture Branch. Agriculture Branch contact information available in bottom right corner of this page, or go to agriculture.gov.yk.ca to find out more.

YUKON YOUNG FARMERS (YYF)

Join Yukon Young Farmers, a Yukon Chapter of the Canadian Young Farmers Federation and a subcommittee of the Yukon Agricultural Association. The group's vision is to encourage and empower Yukon Young Farmers and to create networks to foster sharing, education and help between young farm families.

This group is open to anyone between the ages of 18-45 who are interested in Yukon agriculture and farming in Yukon. If you would like to become a member, "friend" the Yukon Young Farmers group on Facebook.com or e-mail admin@yukonag.ca.

WEBSITES TO CHECK OUT

Rivendell Farms now has a website. Go to rivendellfarm.ca to find out more about their farm, including information about their pick your own program, bedding plants, activities and workshops. They also have some great photos in the Photo Gallery under the "About Us" tab.

Yukon Agricultural Association (YAA) has updated their website. The address has not changed yukonag.ca, but the website has. The updated website is easy to navigate and provides valuable information about YAA, funding, resources, events and equipment.

FIREWEED COMMUNITY MARKET

Will return to Shipyards Park on Thursdays starting May 17, 2012, from 3 p.m. to 8 p.m. For more information visit: fireweedmarket.yukonfood.com.

InFARMation is:

A Yukon government newsletter published by the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, Agriculture Branch. 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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