

Communiqué

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Nova Scotia
Co-operative Council

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Up-Coming Events

- ◆ March 17 - Saint Patrick's Day
- ◆ April 4 - Micro Credit Conference at the Best Western Glengarry Hotel
- ◆ April 6 - Good Friday
- ◆ April 8 - Easter Day
- ◆ April 9 - Easter Monday
- ◆ June 7 - Annual General Meeting (more information TBA)



NSCC Partnering with Making Waves

NSCC partnering with Making Waves - Canada's community economic development magazine - for a special edition on community based health care.



Making Waves has been published by the Canadian Centre for Community Renewal since 1991. Its special editions are a means by which people dedicated to the social and economic vitality of Canada's communities rally support for strategic action in specific issues and sectors.

We are convinced that a special edition concerning the role that community based health care can and must play in the national health system would be of importance in the coming 12 months.

In many respects, Canada's health care system is in crisis. Access to care, long waiting lists for treatments, unnecessary illness, deaths, and errors are matters of rising public concern in most, if not all, of Canada. Were these problems peculiar to one province alone, they could not be attributed

Co-operative Health Check Up

Individuals can often benefit by having a regular health check up. A health check up can point out the many things that you are doing right, such as proper exercise, proper diet, and proper rest; and demonstrate how these factors impact on the performance of your overall health. A regular health check up can also identify health issues that

may be preventing you from living optimally and identify areas that require immediate medical attention.

Many businesses have the health of their business checked on a regular basis. The term used for this business health check up is known as a *business diagnostic*. Business diagnostics can range from a fairly simple

to mismanagement, malevolence, or administrative lethargy. They are not. It would appear that these problems have become systemic.

All Canadians pride themselves on a single-tier health care system that provides care to all based on clinical need. However, the system is now single-tier for price only - not for quality. Some patients, at government expense, have access to timely, multidisciplinary group practices and practices with modern information systems. Many Canadians, especially in our rural areas, cannot even find a family doctor. Our commitment to single-tier health care notwithstanding, you get better access to care today if you are a Canadian soldier, a member of the RCMP, or are covered by Worker's Compensation.

Up to this point, the debate over the future of our health care system has been very narrowly defined; will the public sector drive the necessary changes, or the private sector? Yet neither the public nor the private sectors have displayed initiative adequate to the task.

Some corporate medical *innovations* are designed to supply higher levels of care to employees, for example. In effect, the employer becomes responsible for health care, and a type of indentured servant. For its part, government has clearly demonstrated its inability to act effectively as not only the national health care insurer, but also its administrator, regulator, and evaluator.

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self-assessment process to in-depth evaluations undertaken by independent professional consultants that can cost several thousands of dollars and take weeks to complete.

The Nova Scotia Co-operative Council is currently developing a diagnostic tool that will be

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Farmer's Market Co-operatives Meet the Dramatic Demand

There are ten farmer's market members of the Federation Farmer's Markets of Nova Scotia Co-operative with 400 producer members and an equal number of non-member marketers. These markets have sales of \$4.2 million annually and are doubling in sales every five years. With pressures on primary agricultural producers and the shutting out of traditional retail markets, for many if there were no farmer's markets, there would be no farm.

"Their approach is 'before you do something, you need to do something else first'..."

The interest and support of the public for fresh produce, organic products, and local production has dramatically in-

creased over the past few years. As an example, the City Market Co-operative of Halifax, the largest provincial market, which had its start in 1750, has had a 300 percent increase in its vendors over the past ten years. With the self-imposed requirement of having 60 percent of the vendors be agricultural producers, the market is now forced to find a new, larger premises and increase operations to an all week operation.

The demand from consumers has increased the demand for new vendors, which has

been slow to respond. In recent peak times, there have been as many as 10,000 visits to the market. Producers from all over the province are experiencing this welcomed interest and are in the process of developing the facilities to meet the demand. The Federation is coordinating the markets to meet these needs. Their approach is 'before you do something, you need to do something else first', and that is to assure the markets meet all the requirements for food safety, proper equipment, good parking, motivated enthusiastic staff who understand the principles of fair trade for producers, and exceptional customer service.

The City Market of Halifax has responded to the demand by leasing a 35,000 square foot retail space at Pier 20, which will have a \$7.5 million refit, including solar, turbine, and geo thermal energy components.

The Farmer's Market Co-operative Federation, through the efforts of Don Blank and his board, has provided much needed coordination, information, and training to market managers and directors in the areas of marketing, food safety, governance, insurance,



The City Market of Halifax

fundraising, government relations, and strategic planning, which will strengthen the markets and protect the boards, staff, and consumers. The markets are preparing themselves for the increased demand from the public for farm and craft products and services that are local, fresh, and organic.

The Nova Scotia Co-operative Council has identified farmer's markets as the fastest growing component of its \$600 million agricultural sector, which has the potential to play a significant role in supporting our farmers with fair trade and direct marketing practices in an attempt to reverse the trend of loss of 85 percent of our domestic market.

For more information on farmer's markets in Nova Scotia, contact Fred Pierce at fred@nsco-opcouncil.ca, or via phone at (902) 896-7289.

Written by Fred Pierce, Business Development Officer

Co-operative Health Check up Cont'd

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made available to Council members to help evaluate their governance and business processes. The goal of the diagnostic is not to provide a passing or failing grade, but simply to identify areas that may require special attention. The diagnostic tool will include a self-assessment on issues related to governance and will be completed by the co-operative's board of directors. A financial performance review consisting of key business ratios analysis and a comparison to industry benchmarks will form the second element of the diagnostic.

A brief report will be completed by the Nova Scotia Co-operative Council's staff in conjunction with the board and management. The

report (diagnosis) may include suggestions for improving the fitness level of your co-operative. We hope to deliver this service on a gratis basis to the Council's member co-operatives.

Any co-operatives wishing to learn more about this initiative may contact Shaun Shea at (902) 564-8821 or via email at shaunshea@eastlink.ca.

Written by Shaun Shea, Business Development Officer



Opportunity Through Crisis in the Agricultural Industry

Industries face overwhelming challenges, threatening their very existence. Our agricultural sector is in this situation. Commodities have faced years of low prices, while input prices continue to spiral upward. Much of this has been caused by consolidation in the retail food and food processing industries.

In economics, the ideal scenario is called *perfect competition*, where no buyer or seller has a big enough share of the market to influence price. Buyers and sellers compromise and reach a price that is satisfactory to both.

Perfect competition can certainly be seen on the producer's side. With numerous farms, buyers can go from farm to farm, getting the best price. However, the other half of the equation is missing. The retail

and processing industries have consolidated, leaving only a few purchasers of farmer's produce and livestock. Farmers do not have many places to sell, limiting their ability to negotiate a better price. In many cases, farmers try to minimize losses, instead of making a profit.

When it comes to costs, there is growing pressure. In the 1970s the inflation rates for farm inputs were 40 percent higher than national

rates of inflation. This combination of increasing expenses and decreasing revenues have made profitable farms struggle for survival.

Another trend has been the reduction of infrastructure. As farms close

down, industry suppliers close. Nova Scotia has seen processing plants close, and more are expected, leaving farmers with few options to sell their products.

Opportunity knocks! Often, crisis leads to new opportunities, but we must be willing to look past the current problems and adapt. A multi-faceted approach must be adopted and supported by various stakeholders.

Focus on Higher Value & Niche Products - When the Free Trade Agreement was signed with the US, poorer quality wine from the Niagara Peninsula no longer had the benefit of high tariffs increasing the cost of Californian wine. The government provided financial assis-

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NSCC Partnering with Making Waves Cont'd

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We believe that the terms of the current health care debate miss a critically important element; what is the role of communities in the evolution of health care solutions? What is the potential for community ownership of these solutions and their implementation?

This special edition would challenge readers to consider why community intervention in the health system makes sense, what form that intervention should and could take, and what public policies are necessary to foster such innovation and self-reliance.

There are over one hundred co-operative or community owned health care initiatives already operating across Canada. They point towards current best practice in community based health, as well as its issues and limitations. In light of such practice, this edition will also ask how far community owned and led

interventions should go, given recognition and support. Could they reduce dependency on such expensive public services as emergency rooms? Could they decrease the development of serious illness with early intervention and prevention strategies? Can they meet the escalating demand for primary health care to the elderly?

Finally, this edition will broach the role that government must play in order to realize this opportunity. It will introduce a policy campaign and initiative intended to secure provincial and federal recognition of the health care services supplied by community based organizations.

The point is not to *replace* our current system, but to *enhance* it, using sources that currently are off the radar of the general public and our decision-makers. By marshalling information about the community based alternative, we wish to help to break the political logjam about health care and encourage the more

courageous action that the situation demands. The principle of subsidiary holds that nothing should be done by a larger and

more complex organization that a smaller and simpler organization can do just as well. We believe that Canada's experience with health care bears this out. Most responsibility for the organization and delivery of health care services belongs at the community level, some at the provincial level, and very little at the federal level.

Stay tuned and never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. It is the only thing that every has (Margaret Mead).

Written by Dianne Kelderman, CEO

"Never Doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world..."



Opportunity Through Crisis in the Agricultural Industry Cont'd



tance to growers to replace poor quality grape varieties with a higher quality. This improvement transformed the industry's image, resulting in a vibrant industry with significant tourism spin-offs. This sector is also flourishing in Nova Scotia, its success based on a quality focus, not mass production.

This model needs to be pursued in various sectors. The pork industry

has moved in this direction, focusing on developing niche markets for omega-3, natural, and organic pork.

These initiatives are important demonstrations of producers adapting to consumers. By focusing on niche markets, there is the added benefit of having fewer competitors, giving pricing power to farmers.

Own Your Own Processing Plant & Brand - When a farmer develops a brand and gains the trust of consumers, they are less likely to be displaced by cheaper imports. ACA Poultry Co-operative realized the value of not only processing poultry, but in developing brand awareness through the Eden Valley line of products.

Brand awareness takes development. However, it's an essential step in differentiating from the lowest cost commodity production. If given a choice between owning a processing plant and owning a brand, a brand is more important.

Support Local Buyers & Processors - Co-operatives have been setup to provide farmers with more value adding opportunities. One weakness is the tendency for farmers to demand that all

profits from the co-op flow back to the farm, leaving the co-op vulnerable to downturns in the industry. Also, a lack of loyalty, with producers selling elsewhere when a competitor offers a slightly higher price, leaves plants operating at inefficient levels, further weakening its financial position.

A simple solution to address this is the *new generation co-operative model*. Producers buy one share in the plant for each unit of produce they ship. The farmer receives a reliable market, and makes a commitment to supply a certain number of units to the facility each year, ensuring the plant efficient levels for operations.

These solutions require time and money to develop. Leadership from producers starts the process, government needs to support the transition by good policy decisions and funding, and all have to work together to see it implemented. The current crisis will be worth it, if we end up with more processing facilities, strong producer brands, and more value adding. There isn't much time for contemplation. Action must be taken immediately; but, it will only succeed with co-operation and respect.

For more information on Nova Scotia's agricultural industry, and how co-operatives can play a successful role, contact Jonathan McClelland at jonathan@westernvalleyagri.ca or (902) 245-8776.

Written by *Jonathan McClelland*,
Business Development Officer



WANT A GREAT WAY TO BE CONNECTED TO THE CO-OPERATIVE COMMUNITY?

How about a place to be linked with information on other co-operatives?

...Or a place to find out about current events in your area?

The Nova Scotia Co-operative Council has new (and improved!) website. Some of the many features are:

- « Membership listing page - Send us the name of your organization, your contact information, and even a link to your website. We'll post it in a directory for others to see!
- « Announcements and events pages - Send us a description of your announcements and up-coming events... We'll post them to get the message out to the rest of the co-operative community!

You'll also find publications, information on programs and services, pictures, links, and more!

We're working to make our site the best it can be for you, our members.

Visit www.nasco-opcouncil.ca to see our many improvements. If you would like to participate by sending us items for membership, announcements, or gallery pages, please contact Andrea Jackson via email at nscoopcouncil@eastlink.ca.

Help make the Nova Scotia Co-operative Council's website a truly unique link to the co-operative community!