

Mind candy for empowerment.

December 2002 Column, Country Life in B.C.

Wendy R. Holm, P.Ag.

December. A time of year when most farmers actually get a chance to sit and relax a bit. Spend time with family. Read. Let their minds linger over and absorb more than just the guilt of not getting on with the chore list. A time of pause and reflection before the New Year. Before the making of resolutions and the setting of priorities upon which the next season – and the next turn of our lives – depends.

Here's some good news on two fronts! Both mind-candy for empowerment:

FARMERS RESOLUTION TO REMOVE WATER FROM THE NAFTA

Thanks to VanCity Credit Union and the support of a dozen or so BC farmers and Agrologists, 240 information packages were sent in late October to commodity associations, breed associations, farmers' institutes, farm women's institutes and 4-H clubs across the province.

Under a cover letter from Peace River rancher Heather Bickford, the information packages contained a copy of the Farmers Resolution to Remove Water from the NAFTA, some background material and a half hour video of an interview I did on the Farmers Resolution with Fanny Keefer (Shaw Studio 4).

The response has been fantastic. A scant three weeks after the mail-out, we already have in hand the resolutions of twenty-eight farm organizations. (See inset – is your farm group there? The Resolution appears on page ___ of this issue.)

In late October, the Land Stewardship committee of the BC Cattleman's Association confirmed the Resolution "was passed by the local associations who voted on it and we were given direction to support it at the BCCA level." Land Stewardship Committee member Wayne Ray has been asked to "present and promote the resolution" at the January BCCA meeting. (If you are a cattleman, it wouldn't hurt to call a Board member and add your voice of support...!)

On December 1st, I will be in Toronto to address the Canadian Conference on Unity, Sovereignty and Prosperity on "Democracy at the Brink: The Farmers' Resolution to Remove Water from the NAFTA." Part of my message will be to encourage consumers to say "Yes, We Support Canada's Farmers in This!" (What a lovely beginning...) Other conference speakers include Mel Hurtig, Linda McQuaig and Paul Hellyer.

In mid-January, the Dairy Farmers of Canada are bringing me to Toronto to present the Resolution to the DFC annual policy conference.

On February 14th, I will be presenting the resolutions in a heritage wooden apple box (our fruit growers were the first to pass it last Spring) to Chrétien, Martin, Clark, Harper, McDonough and other Ottawa-types. With as much "splash" as we can muster.

Please make sure your voice is part of this chorus. With your help, we can raise one farm voice on a matter of URGENT public priority. We have a VERY good chance with this one. And the Canadian consumers will love you for it. But hurry! I need those Resolutions in hand by Feb 10th AT THE LATEST.

Facing drought, economic uncertainty, a paucity of farm policy and a poignant lack of farm voice, I predict support for this Resolution will sweep through Canadian farm communities like a breath of fresh air.

CUBA PROJECT

Yes, we have four tours going this winter and yes, we still have some space on most (hurry, hurry; first tour leaves Jan 6th). But the big news is that FINALLY, after four years of slogging, the doors are opening for this project.

Since last summer, I have been working in concert with Dr. Evan Fraser of The Liu Centre for the Study of Global Issues, University of British Columbia (headed up by former Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy) to structure an NGO project to bring Canadian dairy expertise to Cuban farmers in return for a Cuban team to provide Canadian farmers with expertise in biological controls and commercial scale organic production.

Already, the Cubans are rearing *Sitotroga* for Canadian *Trichogramma* to parasitize, producing tiny “bi-national” wasps (Cuban surrogates, Canadian mothers) for biological pest control in BC cranberries, greenhouses and food warehouses.

Already, the Cuban farmers’ lesson of “one voice” is triggering action in Canada (the Farmers Resolution had its origins in the March 2002 Canada Cuba Farmer to Farmer Delegation).

Already, 207 Canadian farmers have gone to Cuba with the Project, this number will be over 300 by Spring. And when they return to their communities, our farmers write in glowing terms about the value of international farmer connections. Connections that will bear fruit in our “stage three” work by harnessing Cuban organic capacity to Canadian value added and marketing strengths. Farmer-driven (keeps venture capital tamed and in the back seat). And farmer-empowering.

HO HO HO! To everyone, a wonderfully warm and nurturing holiday season and a new year filled with strong farm families and even stronger farm communities.

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RESOLUTION'S RECEIVED AS OF NOVEMBER 20th

1. Alberni Farmers' Institute
2. B.C. Fruit Growers' Association
3. Baldonnel Women's Institute
4. BC Farm Women's Organization
5. Bon-Accord Women's Institute
6. Bridge Lake Fair Association
7. Cariboo Sheep breeders' Association
8. Coldstream Women's Institute
9. Delta Farmers' Institute
10. Forest Grove Women's Institute
11. Gardom Lake Women's Institute
12. Groundbirch Women's Institute
13. Heritage Dairy Farmers' Association
14. Kersley Farmers' Institute
15. Kiwi Fruit Association of BC
16. Lynn Creek Women's Institute
17. Mainland Dairymen's Association
18. North Okanagan Organic Association
19. North Pine Farmers' institute
20. Pemberton Women's Institute
21. Prince George Farmers' Institute
22. Quick Women's Institute
23. Reid Lake Farmers' Institute
24. Rock Creek Farmers' Institute
25. Shuswap Thompson Organic Producers Assoc.
26. Similkameen Okanagan Organic Producers Association
27. Surrey Farmers' Institute
28. Tatalrose Farmers' Institute
29. BC Soil and Water Conservation Society
30. New Brunswick Partners in Agriculture
31. J.K Agro Industries Inc.