

Dear. saturdayshow@vancouver.cbc.ca
April 1997 Column, Country Life in B.C.

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A fine, sunny Saturday morning in March. My favourite errands and some overdue puttering till noon. An afternoon tending to clients. At the end of the day, a treat: corned beef and cabbage in celebration of St. Patrick. I am feeling expansive. And about to walk the dog.

The sonorous voice of the CBC pulls me up short: "and, coming up next, our regular Saturday morning food panel will discuss the Agricultural Land Reserve".

Pouring myself another coffee, I turn the radio up, apologize to the dog and begin puttering in the kitchen.

Fatal mistake. In a mere 15 minutes of air time my sunny mood is tossed aside like yesterday's laundry. Not so much because of what the panel says, but what it doesn't say.

Yes, *but what can British Columbians do for agriculture?* the host keeps asking. Panel responses skitter hither and yon, criss-crossing the same old points with the same old rhetoric... Listeners remain in the dark. Having spent the previous evening in the company of Agrologists, I am moved to respond.

Firing up my computer and gathering together a few old columns, I flash off an e-mail to the CBC, copied to the Fraser Basin Council and the Vancouver Sun:

i felt this morning's panel on food missed a few key points. such as:

the effect of changing wholesale and retail buying patterns on the economic viability of local food producers. see march 97 column attached.

the need to tie water rights to all land. see february 97 column attached.

in part, answers also lie in:

calling americans to task over the columbia. see december 96 column attached.

recognizing economic/environmental quarterbacks when we see them [bc's farmers]. see november 96 column and may 96 column attached.

and, perhaps most importantly, adopting a more maternalistic approach to public policy. not so difficult as it may seem... see january 97 column attached.

one of the primary hurdles is in getting these points out into the community.

country life in bc is the monthly newspaper of bc's farm communities. it has a circulation of just under 10,000. last year, at the urging of some delta farmers, i sent a column on a particularly topical issue to the editorial desk of the vancouver sun for consideration as an op-ed piece. i included a few other columns for their interest. i suggested that if they liked i could send them copies of columns from time to time that i felt may have a general readership. i received a letter back saying they were not interested, and further suggesting that next time i feel the urge to submit unsolicited material, i call first.

the bc institute of agrologists just celebrated its 50th year. at yesterday's agm, members endorsed a mandate calling for accountability and stewardship. at the awards dinner following, we felt privileged to accord our professional respect and applause to this year's

three outstanding contributors to bc agriculture: david sands, barry smith and jack freeman. it is important that the media both encourage and profile people like dave, barry and jack in ongoing food policy dialogues.

some food for thought...

Communities want safe food (the ALR as clean and green). They want local jobs (the ALR as industrial park). They want “something” to check the developers (the ALR as hands-off zone for planners). They want green spaces and viewsapes (the ALR as keeper of aesthetic values). They want to know and influence how their food is grown (the ALR as keeper of “close-at-hand” farmers accountable to/influenced by community expectations). They want clean air (the ALR as protection from subdivisions and industry). They want to protect environmental values (the ALR as vital to wildlife habitat strategies - e.g. Delta).

All this is only achievable if farmers remain economically strong and independent. Ergo, getting beyond “BUY BC” to “WHY BUY BC” becomes a priority.

Is it *really* rocket science that the only way communities get these goodies is by supporting local farmers?

Perhaps a mascot would help — how about the humble potato, nice little homely-kinda guy, even sort of cute in a way. Non-threatening. Substantial. Everyone feels comfortable around him... But he needs a persona. Let’s see. A survey of Gen-X’ers by the inimitable John Kitson suggests “spuds rock”. Picture the live/claymation short:

It’s night in the potato field. Jack and Joanie farmer smile into one another’s eyes, switch off the porch light and go inside. The border collie leaps from the old rattan porch swing and scoots in behind them just before the screen door shuts. With a creak. Lights go out in upper bedroom

Sound of crickets up. Camera pans the field. Trees silhouetted in background. Moon. Over the rise in the far corner of the field there appears a faint glow. Camera swings out, wide and low over the fields, approaching the rise. Something like the sound of rock and roll comes up slowly in the background as camera pans over the rise.

It’s a party! BC spuds and spudettes rocking and rolling the night away. Cut-away to one of 8 short (e.g. 10 second) messages on WHY BUY BC (community benefits from farming). Cut back to the party. Close-up of line-dancing spuds; theme song promoting clean, green BC products.

What can British Columbians do for agriculture? They can ask *Where’s the BC product?* each and every time they shop. Four little words that have the potential to change the face of agriculture in this province. But only if spoken.