

# For once, let's hear it for the good guys!

January 1998 Column, Country Life in B.C.

**Wendy R. Holm, P.Ag.**

You should know, dear reader, that almost every column I write these days I also send off by e-mail to the Vancouver Sun's "op-ed" department for consideration as an opinion piece appearing opposite the editorial page.

In fact, I started this at the suggestion of Val Roddick, who demanded of me - in response to a column I'd written on educating the consumer - "why don't we ever see this point of view in the main stream press?"

Being one who takes persons like Val Roddick quite to heart, I sent off to the Vancouver Sun a copy of that month's column (putting the "why" behind the "buy BC") and a few back columns that seemed germane. I also told them what Val had said, and offered to copy them with my future columns.

Guess what? A month or so later I received a letter from the Sun returning my columns and suggesting in, future, that I confirm with them their interest prior to submitting "unsolicited material."

While this hasn't stopped me from cheerfully copying the Sun's op-ed department when I e-mail my column to Malcolm, it does give me pause.

Think yourself, for a moment, a dairy producer. A frustrated dairy producer. You have come back from an industry meeting - what had been your AGM hijacked by the bureaucrats and turned into a patronizing, "just get on with it" bleat - angered by time wasted and a head full of hall discussions on "the real issues".

There were important issues to discuss. Like cream skimming. Yes, everyone knows that Dairy World is out there in a big bad world right now. And that margins are tight. But, producers argue, if you won't pay us for the butter fat anymore, could we please just keep it? There are some cottage industry cheesemakers who would just love to spin it into jobs for our community. At a price that would begin to put a little back into our pockets of what has been taken away over the last 18 months or so.

Understandably, Dairy World needs the schekles too. The rumour circulating at the meeting was that Parmalat, the Italy-based multinational diary conglomerate that recently busted the small independent dairies in Brazil then turned shippers into peons - the same Parmalat that just acquired both Ault and Beatrice dairies in Ontario - has now dropped the gauntlet in B.C. The rumour (so far unconfirmed) is that when Dairy World put in their bid for the next X years of a supply contract with a retail chain. Parmalat bid too. At the same price. Offering a \$10 million signing bonus.

While B.C. was hacking away at farm subsidies, nations around the world were changing GATT-Red to GATT-Green by shifting the basis of agricultural support to environmentally-based payemnts.

For being good stewards and doing things to "farm right" that the market - dominated by lo-cost-in-the-short-term-but-hi-cost-in-the-long-term suppliers like Parmalat - won't pay for.

You know the consumer cares that you produce sustainably. Two independent dairies are looking for organic shippers. (What was previously a market peopled by the fringe has now become mainstream. Not to mention export-friendly.) B.C.'s farmers are clean and green, but

they won't stay that way for long unless something dramatic occurs. This too needed to be spoken about.

On the logo. B.C. farmers. The good guys. The ones with the little green feet... (See my November column.)

The sub-story of the meeting - the story with heart - was that 50 dairy farmers had taken out their cheque books and written \$10 cheques payable to CATHARINE READ IN TRUST to urge a challenge by the B.C. government of Ottawa's CITT decision on onions (see my December column: What to onion producers and Lahr hookers have in common?) Unfortunately, never even made it to the news...

So keep boosting this stuff off to your little local papers. Let's hear it for the good guys.