

Postcards from Cuba!

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Wendy R. Holm, P.Ag.

DEAR CORKY! Congratulations on your fine showing in the NDP Leadership Race! Having empowered agriculture's voice in the governance dialogue, we're counting on you to "stick with'er" and use your new authority to implement the policies you've embraced on our behalf for the last two years. By the way, Agriculture Minister Alfredo Jordan Morales' personal invite of last June to lead a Delegation to Cuba "to analyze the possibilities for cooperation and business between your Province and our country" still holds. How's about May-end? Trustfully yours...

DEAR MAYOR JACKSON AND COUNCIL... Thanks for your strong support for the Canada-Cuba Farmer-to-Farmer Project! Colleagues in Cuba's MINAGRI are putting the final touches on a "first project" which would see a BC team work with a large farmer coop in Camaguay Province to increase milk production in exchange for a Cuban team making themselves available 1) to Delta Farmers Institute to help increase the competitiveness of our commercial organic farming sector and 2) to Rick Hankin, GVRD Parks to develop a project to test Cuba's "organoponica" (urban gardens) model on Colony Farm. Hope to see some Council members as part of the Delegation to Cuba in May... Appreciatively yours...

DEAR MOURA! Everyone's very keen on the idea of a student exchange! Also, I'm trying to organize a one-week Delegation to Cuba in May with a soil-based and research-based tour. A few Spanish speaking students from agriculture (UBC), resource management (SFU) and cooperative studies (UVIC) could play an important role as cross-stream facilitators. I'm off to Queens University to speak on the Project March 23rd. Hope you can join us in Cuba this May... Collegially yours...

DEAR LYLE... We wish you were here to see for yourself the strong support for this sturdy little cooperative Project that in just over one year's time has brought 53 BC farmers to Cuba and 27 Cuban farmers to BC, earning the respect of mayors, ministers, senators, academics, farmers, Agrologists and (most recently) physicians. I will be in Ottawa from Tuesday March 21st until Wednesday evening March 23 and again on Monday March 27th. On behalf of BC's farmers, can I take you to lunch to talk about this important work and its implications for Canada? Impatiently yours...

DEAR WARREN! Your colleague Dr. Gilberto Fleites gave a super presentation to our farmers in Havana. His call for consistency between laws governing environment, agriculture, health and foreign investment was an eloquent expression of his/our support for sustainable agriculture as a fundamental underpinning of community health and environmental integrity. I am pleased and excited at your support, which I know will be pivotal in eliciting consumer/political support! Yours in health...

DEAR BLAIR! Hope you had a good honeymoon, cause you missed one heck of a farm tour! Looks like our first Project will focus on dairy cattle, grains and grasslands management. Hope you and others from Dawson Creek can join us as part of a Canadian delegation traveling there in May! "Peace"-fully yours!...

DEAR DAVE! Now *you* I really do wish were here! We're now visiting farms from Ciego de Avila to Santiago de Cuba. The priority Cuba places on agricultural extension and the role of professionals in policy formulation is to die for! Everywhere there is keen interest in a Canada-Cuba technical session, particularly from Camaguay (plant protection laboratory) and Holguin (Velasco - grains and forage, dairy). Trying to get Corky to head a Delegation here in May. Wouldn't it be neat to have a dozen Agrologists down here first for a week's technical tour? Maybe overlapping with Grupo de

Agricultura Organica's IV Encuentro Nacional May 10 - 24th in Havana? To provide technical advice (and perhaps accompany) the Minister's Delegation?... Saludos!

DEAR HARVIE! You were right all along (:>). What do you think about having our benefits under the first bilateral project focusing on improving the competitiveness of commercial organic production in Delta? Sustainably yours!

DEAR LLOYD! I am delighted to advise that the ripples from this sturdy little project keep on spreading! Phase Three was launched with two very successful farmer tours to Cuba in January and February. Both the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment and the Canadian Society for International Health (a member of Pan American Health Organization, itself a member of the World Health Organization) are strongly supportive of the Project as is their Cuban counterpart. The objectives remain unchanged: to develop a model for meaningful international cooperative engagement between farmers in Canada and Cuba which returns ethical, equitable and sustainable benefits to farming communities in both countries. And provides a model for other countries. Your early and ongoing support for this Project has been very important. Next time you cross paths with Vanclief, do you suppose you could explain it to him? Respectfully yours...

DEAR FARMERS! WISH YOU WERE HERE! The opportunity to develop co-operative joint ventures with Cuba's farmers will have sustainable economic benefits for both farm communities. Join us in this! To reserve *your place* in our upcoming October, November, December, January and February Exchanges, call me now (phone: 604-947-2893; fax 604-947-2321; email: holm@pinc.com). Warmest regards and enduring respect...

Corky Evans, British Columbia Minister of Agriculture
Lois Jackson, Mayor, Municipality of Delta
Moura Quayle, Dean of Agriculture, Univ. of British Columbia
Lyle Vanclief, Canadian Minister of Agriculture
Dr. Warren Bell, Canadian Ass'n of Physicians for the Environment
Blair Lekstrom, Mayor, Dawson Creek
Dave Sands, P.Ag., Director, So. Coastal Region, BC Ministry of Agriculture and Food
Harvie Snow, Snow Farms, Organic Agricultural Consultant
Lloyd Axworthy, Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs