

“The experience of a lifetime.”

October 2000 Column, Country Life in B.C.

Wendy R. Holm, P.Ag.

#10 YOU CAN WRITE IT OFF AS A BUSINESS EXPENSE. If you make your living from farming, you'll have little difficulty justifying this as a business expense! The goal of the Project is to facilitate information transfer and farmer-to-farmer joint venture opportunities. Canada has expertise in processing, packaging, labeling, marketing and sales. Cuba's farmers are world leaders in commercial organic cropping systems, have highly organized cooperatives, good farm extension, unparalleled soil and water resources and a tropical climate. We have a lot to learn from them. They have a lot to learn from us. Together, we're more competitive. Farmer's who travel to Cuba as part of this project are exposed to this potential "from the ground up".

#9. YOU'LL ENJOY ACCESS THAT FARMERS IN OTHER COUNTRIES CAN ONLY DREAM ABOUT. Because Cuba's foodlands are an important aspect of national security, access is extremely restricted. But because the Canada Cuba Farmer to Farmer Project has signed an important Protocol Agreement with the Cuban Government (July 4, 2000), our farmers enjoy continued and unprecedented access to Cuba's large farm cooperatives, laboratories, research stations and processing enterprises. Last February, Canadian farmers visited 23 farms and enterprises in Cuba. By way of comparison, the US-based People to People Ambassador Program's fall 2000 *Agriculture and Agribusiness Leaders Delegation to Cuba* notes 2 farm visits: "Day 5: ..En route, a visit is being requested at a farming operation. ..Day 7: ... We have the option of visiting a cattle ranch, tobacco, grain or citrus farm, or coffee plantation".

#8. YOU'LL SAVE MONEY - AT ROUGHLY FORTY PERCENT THE COST OF SIMILAR TRIPS, THIS TOUR IS EXTREMELY WELL-PRICED. As a Delegate with the Canada-Cuba Farmer to Farmer Project, the cost per person, based on two sharing, including round trip air fare from Canada, all hotel accommodations, virtually all meals, air conditioned coach and air transportation in Cuba, translation, guide, accompanying Agrolgist (me!), transfers, etc. is \$3,000 CDN. By way of comparison, this fall's US-based People to People Ambassador Program's *Delegation to Cuba* (9 not 14 days, two farm visits, FOB Nassau) is \$4,500 Cdn based on two sharing. When you add round trip air fare to the Bahamas, this brings the cost of the US tour to roughly \$5,000 — a per day cost of roughly \$550 Cdn as compared with \$214 CDN for the Canada-Cuba Project.

#7. YOU'LL BE TRAVELING WITH A "GOOD BUNCH" - OTHER FARMERS, ranchers, orchardists, greenhouse and specialty crop growers, bee keepers and the like who are a relaxing and fun group to travel with. (The first twenty spaces in each Delegation are reserved for farmers; an additional five spaces - 21 through 25 - are available for "farmers and/or Agrolgists and/or related professionals and agri-business and/or the occasional agricultural minister " on a first come-first served basis).

#6. YOU'LL BE EXPOSED TO NEW EXPORT MARKET DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES. Cuba's tourism sector is growing at a remarkable 20% a year. Recent world focus on the plight of Elian Gonzalez fueled interest in Cuba as a travel destination. Investor interest in a weekly Vancouver-Calgary-Havana air cargo/passenger service may mean importing Cuban organic orange juice (e.g. through BC Fruit Growers/SunRype?) and exporting BC specialty wines and cheeses may begin to make economic sense. As part of the Protocol we signed with the Cuban government on July 4th of this year, Canada's farm community has a red carpet opportunity to participate in such market opportunities; insuring money sticks to farmers' pockets in both countries rather than coming to rest in the foreign bank accounts of concentrated, oligopolistic market players, stripping farming of its economic sustainability.

#5. YOU'LL EXPERIENCE A CULTURE WHERE FARMERS ARE RESPECTED. A majorly unique - dare we say empowering - experience for Canadian farmers.

#4. YOU'LL BE "IN ON THE GROUND FLOOR" IN TERMS OF ANY FUTURE INITIATIVES. The experience of Cuban agriculture - that large scale commercial organic production IS possible - is a lesson for the world. By partnering with Cuba, Canada can piggy-back on this expertise. We now have in place a five-member Canadian Advisory Board: Moura Quayle, Dean, Faculty of Agricultural Sciences, University of British Columbia; Evelyn Pinkerton, Professor, School of Resource & Environmental Management, Simon Fraser University; Ian MacPherson, Director, BC Institute for Co-operative Studies, University of Victoria; Susan Babbitt, Professor, Department of Philosophy, Queens University; and Dr. Warren Bell, President, Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment. Farmers who participate in these Delegations will receive regular updates on the Project and are "in on the ground floor" in terms of any future initiatives.

#3. YOU'LL ENJOY SOME OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL BEACHES AND HOTELS IN THE WORLD. We start the tour with two days/three nights at the beautiful Hotel Melia Varadero and conclude with three days/nights at Havana's fabulous Hotel Nacional.

#2. YOU'LL SEE "THE REAL CUBA" THAT TOURISTS NEVER EXPERIENCE... During your nine day tour of Cuba's farming communities we will leave the tourist zones and travel into the countryside to experience what many describe as the real source of Cuba's sunshine: the warmth and hospitality of the Cuban people. During the farm tour portion of the trip, there is ample time set aside for sightseeing, sampling Cuban culture and even horseback riding on the beach at pristine Cayo Coco if you're so inclined.

#1. YOU'LL HAVE THE TRIP OF A LIFETIME. (AND ISN'T THAT ABOUT TIME?) It 's perhaps best expressed in the words of other farmers: "wonderfully unique... ..an opportunity to see places other tourists have never been... Thank's for the experience of a lifetime..."

What more can I add...? Just your name to our list of Delegates for one of our upcoming fall and winter tours!

November 13th to 27th
December 4th to 18th,
January 15th to 29th
February 5th to 19th
February 26th to March 12th

For more information and/or to book space contact me at:

PHONE: 604.947.2893 FAX: 604.947.2321 email: holm@pinc.com

or drop me a note: RR #1, L-25, Bowen Island, British Columbia, Canada VON 1G0.