

10 excellent reasons to go to Cuba this winter. December 2001 Column, Country Life in B.C.

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The Packer, long-established trade paper to the US produce industry, ran a four part series last Spring entitled Cuba: An Island of Opportunity. Before the US embargo, Cuba supplied 10% of US tomato imports, half their winter cucumber imports and was the dominant supplier of all other winter vegetables with the exception of peppers (in which Cuba trailed Mexico). Cuba was the number two supplier of mangoes, provided 30% of US pineapple imports and was the sole foreign supplier of avocados. The third largest producer of grapefruit in the world, Cuba's citrus production - 75% of which is exported as concentrate - hits the market six to eight weeks ahead of the Florida crop.

But Cuba's real competitive potential lies in its commercial organic capacity, born of necessity with the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the words of The Packer: *"Growers employ legions of beneficial worms to foment a nutrient-rich muck of organic and recycled materials. Many farms use a mixture of organic and hydroponic methods, cultivating the crop in continually moistened, raised beds. Soil is enriched with biofertilizers and free-living bacteria that make atmospheric nitrogen available for the crops, while insects are warded off with bacterial and fungal diseases instead of chemical insecticides. In some cases, yields have returned to levels not seen since the special period began (1990). Indeed, Cuba's organic Agriculture Group won the Swedish Parliament's prestigious 1999 Right Livelihood Award for advances in organic agriculture."*

As US agri-business interests are chomping at the bit to get into Cuba, Canadian farmers have a red carpet invitation from the Cuban government to come down and see for themselves what is happening in this intriguing country. Here, then, are ten excellent reasons for you to go!

#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. 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 further to a Protocol Agreement we have signed with the Cuban Government, our farmers enjoy unprecedented access to Cuba's large farm cooperatives, laboratories, research stations and processing enterprises. Last Winter, 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 only 2 farm visits.

#8. YOU'LL SAVE MONEY - AT FORTY PERCENT THE COST OF SIMILAR TRIPS, THIS TOUR IS EXTREMELY WELL-PRICED. The cost per person, based on two sharing, including round trip air fare from Canada, all hotel accommodations (7 nights in 5 star hotels, 7 nights in personally selected countryside hotels), virtually all meals, air conditioned coach and air transportation in Cuba, translation, guide, accompanying Agriologist (me!), transfers, etc. is \$3,500 Cdn. When you add in air fare from western Canada to the Bahamas, the nine day US People to People Ambassador Cuba tour (FOB Nassau) cost roughly \$5,500 Cdn —\$611/day as compared with \$250/day for the Canada-Cuba Farmer to Farmer tours.

#7. YOU'LL BE TRAVELING WITH A "GOOD BUNCH" — OTHER FARMERS: Dairy farmers, crop farmers, ranchers, orchardists, poultry farmers, greenhouse growers and the like - a relaxing and fun group to travel with. The first twenty spaces in each Delegation are reserved for farmers only; an

additional five spaces are available for "farmers, Agrologists, agribusiness persons and/or professionals in the fields of: health, environment, cooperatives or ethics".

#6. YOU'LL BE EXPOSED TO NEW MARKET OPPORTUNITIES. As a safe and friendly haven, Cuba's tourism sector is growing at over 20% a year. Investor interest in a weekly Western Canada to Havana air cargo/passenger service may mean importing Cuban organic orange juice and exporting Canadian beef, wines and cheeses may begin to make economic sense.

#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. 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 begin with 3 nights at the beautiful 5 Star Hotel Melia Varadero and conclude with 3 nights at Havana's fabulous 5 Star Hotel Nacional.

#2. YOU'LL SEE "THE REAL CUBA" THAT TOURISTS NEVER EXPERIENCE... Cuba is a safe and gentle destination with a unique culture and warm and friendly people. During your 8 day tour of Cuba's farming communities, we leave the tourist zones and travel into the countryside, visiting the provinces of Ciego de Avila, Camaguary, Holguin, Santiago de Cuba. There is ample time 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... Thanks for the experience of a lifetime..."

What more can I add...? Just your and your sweetie's name to one of this year's Winter Delegations!

January 28th - February 11th
February 18th - March 4th
March 11th - March 25

Contact me by phone: 604.947.2893, fax: 604.947.2321 or email: <holm@pinc.com>. BOOK EARLY TO AVOID DISAPPOINTMENT! Vancouver and Edmonton departures.