

Forstbauer's goal is to make farmers' markets No. 1

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Published: September 01, 2008 6:00 PM

Updated: September 01, 2008 9:32 PM

Chilliwack's Mary Forstbauer, President of the B.C. Association of Farmers; Markets is convinced the Farmers' markets, given strong consumer and government support, can become B.C.'s number one agriculture industry within ten years. Forstbauer along with Mayor Derrick Corrigan was at the Burnaby Farmers' market to receive a grant from Ottawa.

James Moore, Secretary of State and MP for Port Moody-Westwood-Port Coquitlam, presented a cheque on behalf of the Federal Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz, in the amount of \$219,000 to help develop a strategic plan and improve the public's image of Farmers' Markets.

"Farmers' markets are valuable to local economies and help farmers connect with urban consumers," said Moore.

Funding for this initiative is being provided to the B.C. Association of Farmers' Markets (BCAFM) through Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Advancing Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food (ACAAF) program, which is delivered in B.C. through the Investment Agriculture Foundation (IAF) of B.C.

The association will use the funding to implement a strategic plan, with the goal of improving the public image of farmers' markets, and the management skills and capacity of market managers, vendors and boards.

"Farmers' markets are one of the fastest growing opportunities for farmers to build their market share and make their farms sustainable," said President Forstbauer.

Thanks to the funding received through the Investment Agriculture Foundation of B.C., the BCAFM will continue to build capacity for farmers' markets in the province."

Farmers' markets in B.C. contribute significantly to farm incomes and to the economy of communities in which they operate. A 2006 study by the University of Northern British Columbia found that B.C. farmers' markets contributed \$118.5 million annually to the provincial economy, with \$65.3 million per year spent at the markets and another \$53.2 million at neighbouring businesses.

Drive around the Delta area, you will find new signs promoting local produce which is marketed through BCFresh, formerly known as the Lower Mainland Vegetable Producers Inc. Murray Driediger, the former General Manager of the B.C. Vegetable Marketing Commission is now the President and Chief Executive Officer with BCFresh, and instrumental in developing this latest initiative.

The new marketing vision is more in-tune with the times, and clearly delivers the message that local produce is not only fresh, but grown by local producers.

That was the message they wanted to convey was a new look that would appeal to consumers," said Driediger.

BCFresh has also completely redesigned its packaging, increasing its shelf appeal for consumers and using new graphics to showcase the farms and product.

"Our potato and carrot bags and other retail packs are just the beginning," he said, noting that by September 1, all of its "major SKUs" (Stock Keeping Units) would be packed in poly bags made with earth friendly resin, making them biodegradable.

Greg Holmes, Sales Manager for the Delta, BC-based firm said that, "we have also redesigned all of our corrugated and foodservice packaging for our clients."

Driediger said it has also "embarked on a new and dynamic marketing campaign that is 'fresh and lively' and puts its shareholders front and centre."