

FRESH



FROM THE ISLAND

# The Rooster Tale

Fall 2008  
Volume 1 Issue 4

Quarterly Newsletter of the Island Farmers' Alliance

## Closer is Better

There's probably not a soul in Canada who isn't familiar by now with the word Listeria. It appears that one death on Vancouver Island has been linked to the meat coming from the Maple Leaf Foods plant in Toronto. This incident has made me reflect once again on how far away we have gotten from knowing where our food is grown or who produced it.

Michael McCain, president of Maple Leaf Foods has to be commended for taking full and complete responsibility for the results of the contamination and for keeping the public fully aware of the steps he and his company were taking to fix the problem. Even so, I can't help feeling that we as consumers are also to blame. How is it that we have allowed such vast decentralization of our food? I was unaware until the outbreak that deli meat I purchase at my local supermarket or that pre-made sandwiches being served in hospitals or long-term care facilities likely originated in Toronto. I am, frankly, appalled by the fact that a contaminated meat slicer in Toronto caused a death on Vancouver Island. But I'm also aware that we don't yet have the infrastructure on the Island to be food self-sufficient.

A recent article in the Cowichan Citizen (Wednesday Oct 01, 2008) posed the following idea: "Ever wonder what would happen if suddenly our borders were closed...like on 9/11. No planes came in, no planes left. Trucks carrying our food were stuck in the United States, unable to enter Canada. Food was scarce on the shelves for a time. What if it happened again? What if it happened to a larger degree? Or for a longer time? What then?"

The municipality of North Cowichan is starting down the road to finding answers to these questions. What they find will be scary. With only 4 to 6% of food eaten on the Island being produced here we Islanders are very vulnerable. Another article in the Times Colonist on October 11th underscored the dilemma facing farmers in getting their food to market. New regulations implemented last fall now force poultry farmers to process their livestock through government-licensed inspection plants before the meat can be sold in stores. The nearest plant for all of Greater Victoria is in the Cowichan Valley. Trucking the birds to the lower mainland or the Cowichan Valley virtually eliminates any kind of profit. If this were me, I'd look for a new business.



The time is NOW for Island citizens to express our desire for local food security and to advocate on behalf of farmers. Let's use our dollars to support local producers by buying locally and use our vote in the upcoming Municipal elections to encourage politicians to facilitate agricultural infrastructure.

Kathleen Erickson,  
Owner/Publisher  
Buy Sell & Trade, Inc



## Questions you can ask to Municipal Candidates

Most farmers are aware of the Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act sometimes referred to as FPPA. Most of us believe that this act has the best interests of farmers at heart and that it protects us from conflict with municipal governments and individuals who may not share our views on how a farm should operate. The document itself is available on line (<http://www.alc.gov.bc.ca/alr/fppa.htm>) via a PDF file, and is certainly worthy of a careful read. Like most legislation, it would take a keener mind than mine to truly understand, but I sense that its original spirit has been tinkered with and weakened but in general terms, it is intended to protect what could be defined as traditional farm practices.

I suspect that only a few municipal politicians are truly aware of the FPPA. The level of awareness would rise sharply if conflict should arise, like the building of a berm around wetland, or the clearing of an urban forest that the residents of a community have come to believe is theirs by some sort of "right". With municipal governments climbing onto the Green Bandwagon, I would suggest candidates be asked to respond to a three part question:

1. Are you familiar with the Provincial Farm Practices Protection (right to farm) act?
2. Do the bylaws of your municipality conflict with this act?
3. What are you prepared to do to ensure that your bylaws do not conflict with this act and that your council can honestly declare that they are Farm-friendly?

Some likely areas of conflict, just to name a few, include: use of firearms, animal control, open burning, fence heights, drainage, use of berms, signage, hours of operation, noise and odors.

As an example, I do not consider the community, which has enveloped my farm to be farm friendly. I believe that their bylaws were drafted through ignorance of farm practice rather than malice, but there is a huge gulf between us. For that reason, I have refused to participate in any farm market held within this particular municipality's boundaries.

David Pollock



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'Fresh from the Island' signs  
\$50.00 each  
Contact David Pollock  
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'Fresh from the Island' Labels  
Contact Barb Grimmer  
1-250-629-3819

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# Island Farmers' Alliance President's Message



## A New face for Agriculture and Farming on Vancouver Island

On October 2nd I attended a meeting sponsored by the North Cowichan Municipality on Food Security. Over 80 people, from all walks of life, were present and enthusiastic about changing the Cowichan Valley. They organized table seating into three groups – wild foods, rural agriculture and urban agriculture. “Wild foods” mean native species that are edible around us. Efforts are underway to educate children and adults alike about this possibility. A Wild Food effort ensures biodiversity and is to be encouraged. Rural agriculture was well represented and focused on key issues such as municipal water for irrigation, enhanced water storage for farms, collecting rain water in reservoirs to reduce well aquifer drawn down for urban areas. Also development of an equipment co-operative was suggested to be modelled on the successful one in the Comox Valley.

However, the topic of most interest to me was urban agriculture. We all know the terms urban farming, urban cowboy and community gardens. Also, we know a family of four can exist on a four by eight foot raised bed intensively managed. In our last issue of the Rooster Tale, Bob Mitchell, suggested tearing out our lawns and planting vegetable gardens. One of the evening's suggestions was the municipality making available vacant areas or lots, flower beds and renting out land in transition for gardening purposes. Oak Bay changed its bylaws this year to permit urban farming by local entrepreneurs on consenting citizens' lots and selling the produce at local markets. I believe these changes are all about empowering us so that we can make a difference. In addition, these efforts can be sustainable and move us toward producing more than 5% of our food on Vancouver Island. In addition, we need to support and educate anyone with the patience, effort and will to grow more food. For example, effort toward an agriculture resource centre at Vancouver Island University as per Dr. Jenny Horn, must be supported in a major way. A sincere thank-you to all the groups that supported this centre.

You can find more information about the centre in our summer Rooster Tale ([www.islandfarmersalliance.org](http://www.islandfarmersalliance.org))

Bill Code, MD, President IFA



Eat Fresh... Buy Local!



**FRESH FROM THE ISLAND**

**ISLAND FARMERS' ALLIANCE CODE OF ETHICS**

As a member of the Island Farmers' Alliance, I hereby commit to the following code of ethics:

- My farm business will observe the highest standards of excellence, and will produce and maintain a product of superior quality and freshness;
- My farm business will rigorously manage production to assure consumer health & safety;
- My farm business will conduct itself with honesty and integrity;
- My farm business accepts responsibility for stewardship of the land and water;
- My farm business will provide for high standards of animal welfare;
- My farm business will help to create an awareness of the importance of agriculture and "Fresh from the Island" products;
- My farm business will contribute to the advancement of Island agriculture.

### A FARMER'S LAMENT

I stand in front of the gathering, shabby hat in hand, worn clothing, unpolished boots and weather-beaten face giving mute testimony to my station in life.

I say, "Hello, my name is Dave and I am a farmer."

My peers chant back, "Welcome, Dave".

I say, "I come from a long line of farmers, dating back to colonial times in the Victoria area".

"We hear you, Dave"

"This year, urban deer, rabbits, grey squirrels and wireworm devastated my crops, and C-difficult may be lurking in my carrots."

"We have all been there, Dave"

"I am at the end of my tether, I am nearly sixty years old and am subsidizing my habit with earnings from outside sources. I have over a million dollars invested in land and machinery and despite my wife and I working seven days a week, we make less than ten thousand dollars per year. There are now

twenty –new houses on the farm next door and the people in them object to the way we look and smell. It does not matter that we were there first."

"You have lots of company, Cave, you are not alone: in fact Stats Can says you fit the profile of the average farmer perfectly."

I shuffle back to my chair, relieved that my confession has made me feel welcome in this fellowship. I worry that our little group has become smaller in the last few years and wonder who will be the next to leave us. My higher power makes me believe that I am here to stay.

As the next speaker begins, I do not hear her because the works of my Grandfather start to echo in my mind. "Son, if you are smart enough to be a farmer, you are too smart to be a farmer."

"But you are a farmer, Grand-dad."

David Pollock,  
farmer and

IFA (Island Farmers Alliance) Director.



I.F.A. ~ we're growing for you!



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FRESH



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# ISLAND FARMERS

## LET'S GET BACK



### Biodiversity and Habitat Conservation

"A GUIDE FOR BC FARMERS AND RANCHERS". See the guide on the web at [http://www.bcac.bc.ca/EFP\\_pages/documents/index.html](http://www.bcac.bc.ca/EFP_pages/documents/index.html)

I was invited and served on a Food Security panel at the September Habitat Conservation Connection meeting in Victoria. Excellent presentations included Guy Dauncy on climate change and talks on endangered species and habitat preservation. How does this tie into farming on Vancouver Island? Hugely! In fact, the new plank to the Canada British Columbia Environmental Farm Plan Program (administered on VI by the IFA) is "Planning for Biodiversity, A guide for BC Farmers and Ranchers".

See the guide on the web at [http://www.bcac.bc.ca/EFP\\_pages/documents/index.html](http://www.bcac.bc.ca/EFP_pages/documents/index.html)

Farmers and ranchers are concerned stewards of their land. They care about the land, as it is their home and livelihood. We now understand that healthful interaction of all species of animals, plants, insects, bacteria and fungi are key to our own survival. I will quote some of the program's startling numbers:

1. 75% of all foods are from 12 plant crops
2. 96% of commercial vegetables available in 1990, 3 are now extinct
3. The loss of crop and livestock diversity puts the world food and fiber supply at risk

Their initial brochure on biodiversity describes 8 Biodiversity Principles. In summary, managing for biodiversity is about conserving the variety and number of all living things, including both native and domestic species and the relationships and interaction among them.

From my personal perspective, monoculture of wheat, corn and soybeans has only served us well in an era of cheap oil. Herbicide and pesticide overuse has served us no better than aggressive drug use (on our animals and ourselves). By re-establishing conservation and biodiversity principles as we grow our food we can continue to feed the earth.

This comprehensive approach to farming helps the farm/residential tax split assessment problem by minimizing its impact. By farming in this manner we realize the weakness in the pro-GMO argument. For example, we now know many butterflies are killed by the pollen of GMO corn. In addition, fertility is reduced by a



50% of the world food consumed is from just 3 plant crops

third in animals fed GMP foods, e.g. corn and soybeans. If this concept makes me a rebel, then so be it. I am tired of wearing the yoke, designed for 'our own good', by the multinational agricultural and pharmaceutical companies in the name of profit. We must feel empowered to regain control of our destiny as farmers and citizens by sharing our ideas, wisdom and building our own trust relationships.

If you would like to comment on this or any other article you can reach us by email at: [info@islandfarmersalliance.org](mailto:info@islandfarmersalliance.org) or by mail at Island Farmers' Alliance, c/o 41 Nicol Street, Nanaimo, BC V9R 4S7.

By Dr. Bill Code, President IFA  
Farmer: Code's Corner, Duncan, BC



St. Croix sheep at the farm of Geoff & Gloria Chedzoy, Qualicum Beach

### Agricultural Water - Gold for Farmers

Farmers need water to grow things. On Southern Vancouver Island, we get less rain in the growing season than the Okanagan. That means all our farmers are completely dependent upon some artificial water source. It can be municipal, surface, groundwater, or some combination thereof.

Those farmers who possess surface water rights are very lucky. Almost all the lakes and streams in the populated areas of our island are fully subscribed and more licences are not being issued. More farmers are dependent upon wells. But groundwater availability is very localized. Most people who drill wells have a hard time finding enough water for domestic purposes, much less growing crops. Further, British Columbia happens to be the only province in Canada without groundwater legislation. Consequently, people with wells are at risk of having more wells drilled in their area that tap out their water supply. This has happened on the Saanich Peninsula where sea water has invaded

agricultural wells. Some streams are also put at risk by wells placed too close to their banks.

The best water supply is provided by government. Only governments have the means to create water systems that optimize the use of the resource. As case in point: the Capital Regional District operates a water authority mandated to provide water south of the Malahat. (Disclaimer: I have been a member of the CRD Water Board and so have some familiarity with its operations.) Recently, CRD Water purchased the Leech River watershed which had been seriously degraded due to unwise logging practices. CRD Water is now expending money and resources to fix the roads, landslips, and to reforest the land devastated by Western Forest Products and its predecessors. It is estimated that after about fifty years of remediation, the watershed will have been refurbished enough to again provide usable domestic water. No private corporation would ever contemplate making such an investment. Who would put up money for a scheme that won't pay

Do you have a comment or a statement to make? We welcome your feedback. email Kathleen Erickson at [katheric@telus.net](mailto:katheric@telus.net) or by mail to The Buy Sell & Trade 41 Nicol St., Nanaimo, BC V9R 4S7

# FARMERS' ALLIANCE TO OUR ROOTS



**FRESH**



**FROM THE  
ISLAND**

## Conference and Annual General Meeting Building Agriculture on Vancouver Island

**November 15, 2008 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.**

**LOCATION:** Providence Farm, 1843 Tzouhalem Road, Duncan, BC

**ENJOY SPEAKERS ON SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND VIABLE APPROACHES FOR US ALL**

Please attend if you are interested in Food Security, Municipal planning and Farming, both rural and urban

\$50 includes lunch. \$40, Early Bird Registration until October 31, 2008.

Mail your registration to PO Box 188, Mill Bay, BC V0R 2P0

Annual General Meeting of the IFA at 3:00 pm, no charge to attend this only.

**Island Farmers' Alliance Annual Conference and General Meeting Registration Form:** please fill out and return this portion with a cheque for the registration fee.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I, \_\_\_\_\_, would like to support farming on Vancouver Island by joining the Island Farmers' Alliance.

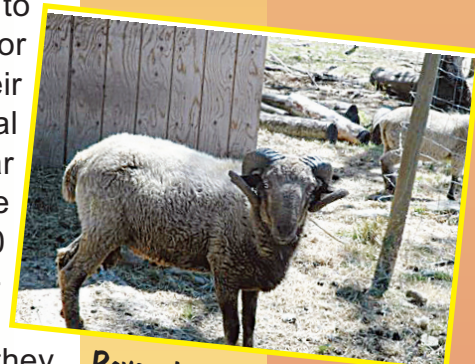
**Renewal:** (circle one)    Farm    Associate    Rooster Booster

**New:**

- Farm Membership (\$35/year)
  - Associate Membership (\$35)\*
  - Rooster Booster Membership (\$25)
- Please add the membership cost to your cheque.



*Grape Producers Abound on Vancouver Island*



*Ravenstone Farm, Qualicum Beach Navajo Churro Sheep. Brought to the 'new world' by the Spanish, these heritage sheep can have 2, 3, 4, or even 5 horns.*

Bob Mitchell

Farmer and Island Farmers' Alliance Director



off for half a century? Other than the public, that is.

A bit over ten years ago, CRD water initiated an agricultural water rate. The rate was pegged at the then wholesale tariff which was about twenty cents a cubic meter. The wholesale tariff has risen subsequently so as to pay costs of remediating the Leech watershed and other such projects but the Ag rate has remained pretty much the same. The rate translates into a water cost of about \$250 an acre-foot for farmers. It is still pretty expensive water, but not as expensive as CRD retail water which is now over \$1500 an acre-foot. When the Ag rate was initiated, people expressed concern that farmers would hog water and waste it. Ag water consumption has increased at about 1.4% a year over the last decade, which is less than the increase in population, so the concerns about water wastage were unfounded. The quantity used for agriculture is well under five percent of the total and will remain there. At \$250 and acre-foot, there is a strong incentive for farmers to use

alternate sources and efficient watering systems.

The CRD agricultural water program is tied to domestic services. Anyone who qualifies for farm taxes can get the agricultural rate on their domestic meter. They have to pay the normal retail rate for the first 450 cubic meters a year and the Ag rate at everything over that. The average domestic consumer uses about 300 cubic meters a year. The majority of subscribers are more than willing, however, to finance a water subsidy to farmers because they know that they will not be able to get local fresh fruit and vegetables without it. The CRD program has demonstrated that a water subsidy for small-scale farmers can be quite useful in supporting local agriculture without seriously impacting the supply for the public.

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