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Hemp power

Could industry in the very near future be powered by hemp? According to Integrated Digital Services Limited of Glace Bay, Nova Scotia, it's a definite possibility.

With the help of \$79,728 in funding from Agri-Futures Nova Scotia under Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Canadian Agricultural Adaptation Program (CAAP), the company is at the pre-commercialization stage of developing a solid bio-combustible heating fuel made largely from the woody core of the industrial hemp plant.

The project has three components. The first will test hemp pellets as a replacement or auxiliary fuel for industrial boilers or large kiln operations. In the second component, a farm gate business model will be developed to assist farmers in understanding the business viability of growing industrial hemp. The third component will involve the collection and assessment of agronomic information related to hemp production in Nova Scotia.

Hemp has unique fibers which are widely used in the making of a number of products ranging from rope to clothing. The woody core of the stem accounts for approximately 60 per cent of the plant and has been used in making chipboard and animal bedding. In Canada, the core has been largely seen as waste.

However, Thomas O'Keefe of Integrated Digital Services Limited is intent on changing all of that.

O'Keefe said the biggest problem burning hemp pellets has been the occurrence of waste material commonly known as clinkers. He said the company has developed technology to overcome that problem.

With clinkers eliminated during combustion, commercial and industrial users could consider industrial hemp as a viable renewable fuel. That, in turn, could see hemp incorporated by producers in their crop rotation as an alternative crop.

Another major challenge for this initiative is the lack of a primary production facility for industrial hemp anywhere in North America.

O'Keefe sees the development of a hemp production plant as the next step. He said that such a plant would probably be built somewhere in the Maritimes which would be central to adequate agriculture and shipping infrastructure.

"This will increase sales opportunities for producing hemp and the potential to provide a whole new fuel source that can cut costs for farming operations," noted O'Keefe.

O'Keefe praised Agri-Futures Nova Scotia for its support, saying they have been key in allowing the company to move the project along.



The knowledge economy

Database offers potato farmers competitive edge

Forget the old saying that “a little knowledge is a dangerous thing.” In the world of potato marketing, having as much information as possible can lead to higher prices and that is something every farmer wants.

Robert Gareau is the executive director of Potatoes New Brunswick, the marketing and lobbying voice of New Brunswick’s 225 growers. He says that despite being one of the major potato producing regions in the country, growers here are behind many of their counterparts across the country when it comes to real information.

The kind of information the province’s growers are not getting relates to acreage planted, storage inventories, varieties planted, and market destinations.

As a result, Potatoes New Brunswick is carrying out a \$123,000 project to develop a database on marketing and production.

The project is funded by the New Brunswick Agricultural Council through Agriculture and Agri-Food’s Canadian Agricultural Adaptation Program.

“We are expecting the database to come on stream in March of 2011 and we plan to make it an on-going effort,” said Gareau, who believes a lack of information has put N.B. growers at a disadvantage when negotiating with buyers. “We need to have the same kind of information at our fingertips that the buyers do.”

He said a number of other jurisdictions, most notably Prince Edward Island, are already collecting much of the information to which New Brunswickers will have access when this project is completed.

Project coordinator Chris Petty is consulting with industry players in P.E.I. to seek their advice, and Statistics Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency are also working closely with Potatoes New Brunswick on this project.

Gareau said this effort goes hand in hand with what the potato industry in North America is trying to do through the United Potato Growers of America and Canada. “We are sharing information between



jurisdictions now in a way that hasn’t happened in the past.”

The database will provide growers with a snapshot of the industry at any time during the year that includes acres planted and harvested, weekly holdings, prices and market destinations.

It is hoped that putting this information in the hands of growers will cut down the practice of “panic selling” or moving product below the cost of production.

“This industry is changing and we have to change with it,” said Gareau. “The days of just putting a crop in the ground and selling it for whatever you can get are on the way out. It is a much more complex marketplace now and growers need all of the information they can get to make the best choices for their operations.”

Cranberry industry on verge of expansion

The cranberry industry in New Brunswick is on the verge of a major expansion due to a \$90-million processing plant underway in Rogersville and the possibility of a producer agency being created in the province.

There has been slow but steady growth in cranberry production since the berries were first harvested commercially in the early 1990s. Last year, 22 growers produced a \$9-million crop from 190 hectares of land.

The new processing plant in Rogersville is expected to drive that number up significantly.

To help meet the needs of this dynamic industry, the New Brunswick Cranberry Growers Association is moving towards agency status under the province's Natural Products Act.

With the status, the group will be able to collect mandatory levies from producers to support marketing and promotional activities.

The Association received \$67,500 from the New Brunswick Agricultural Council to hire a consultant to hold a series of consultations on mandatory status with growers.

The funding was made available through Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Canadian Agricultural Adaptation Program.

The consultant retained by the Association has indicated that there was overwhelming support for the idea at all the meetings that were held.

The association has been charging a voluntary levy to help finance its marketing and promotional activities. Even though most producers did honour the voluntary system, there was no real way to ensure compliance.

That will change when the group moves to agency status. Having a firm understanding of the amount of revenue it will be bringing in means members will



be able to hire a general manager to help look after the association's day-to-day activities.

The approach is patterned on what the blueberry growers have done.

Following the consultations, a plebiscite was held under the Natural Products Act that gave a green light to the planned move.

An official request to be recognized as a regulated agency under the Natural Products Act has been forwarded to the New Brunswick Farm Products Commission for final approval.

"We hope that will happen by the time this year's crop is harvested," said Gerry Richard, President of the New Brunswick Cranberry Growers Association

The new agency designation will allow the group to communicate more effectively with its members and with potential research and marketing partners. It will also make it possible for it to support research, develop markets and conduct promotional activities.

Poultry industry wants local solution to processing challenge



Chicken and turkey farmers in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island are working together to develop a new model for poultry processing in Nova Scotia.

The need for a new processing solution resulted from the closure of a large processing operation in Nova Scotia. Since that time, close to 40 per cent of Nova Scotia's chicken production has been processed in New Brunswick.

The industry needs a solution that can permit the processing of all poultry in the province, which will ensure the self sufficiency and long term viability of the sector.

The proposed model involves the development and implementation of a producer-owned company that would partner with Maple Lodge Farms of Ontario to form a new poultry processing company for Nova Scotia.

As part of creating a Nova Scotia-based solution to poultry processing, the new model also includes the development of a business plan and a preliminary engineering study.

Funding to design the model has been provided through Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Canadian Agricultural Adaptation Program (CAAP). Agri-Futures Nova Scotia approved \$400,000 towards the project.

On July 2010, the Nova Scotia poultry industry strategic planning committee and Maple Lodge Farms announced plans to build a new \$46-million poultry processing facility in Kentville, NS. The facility is expected to be operational by spring 2012.

One of the key components of the new processing company model will be a 50/50 partnership between the farmers and Maple Lodge Farms. It is believed that a 'made in Nova Scotia' processing solution is essential in ensuring that production volume remains at a sustainable level.

ACORN see potential for organic growth in local processing plants

The food processing industry is vital to Prince Edward Island's economy. With a significant number of underutilized processing plants in the province, Beth McMahon believes there is plenty of room to expand the production of organic foods for the value-added market.

But getting into the value-added realm can take a little investigation and idea crunching, says the Atlantic Canadian Organic Regional Network (ACORN) executive director.

That's why the organization published two guides this summer for farms and businesses considering the development of an organic processed product. Each publication is available for free download from the homepage of ACORN: www.acornorganic.org.

The publications were developed with \$29,866 in funding from the PEI ADAPT Council through Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Canadian Agriculture Adaptation Program.

The first publication is called *Value Plus: Quest for new organic farm value on Value-Adding*. This extensive handbook was used at ACORN's value-adding workshop in PEI in April 2010. It is an invaluable resource for anyone considering value-adding or looking for new ways to add diversity to their current farm products.

The second guide is called *Value Added: Resources for organic farms and businesses in the Maritimes*. It covers the certification of processed organic products, detailed listings for Maritime

processors interested in organic processing and funding programs for product development.

The guide also includes specific information about the organic certification process for value-added products.

McMahon said sales of organics in Canada hit \$2 billion in 2008 and continue to grow.

"The organic sector needs to build its capacity to produce value-added products that result in added profitability for our region. There are opportunities for small-scale on-farm processing, as well as those with existing facilities that have the capacity to partner or co-pack. Value-adding is something that every producer should at least consider," she said.

Ready for CAAP? Agri-Futures Nova Scotia making it easy to apply for adaptation program

Do you have a question about the new Canadian Agricultural Adaptation Program (CAAP)? Are you wondering whether you have a project that fits the required guidelines? Perhaps you have just heard about CAAP and need more information?

If so, here are some answers that may help you decide if your farm or group is eligible for funding under the new program.

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Canadian Agricultural Adaptation Program (CAAP) is a five-year (2009-2014), \$163 million national program with the objective of facilitating the agriculture, agri-food, and agri-based products sector's ability to seize opportunities, respond to new and emerging issues, and pathfind and pilot solutions to new and ongoing issues to help the sector adapt and remain competitive.

Agri-Futures Nova Scotia is the regional organization that administers CAAP in Nova Scotia. Applicants can find information about CAAP on Agri-Futures Nova Scotia newly redesigned website (www.agri-futures.ns.ca), said Executive Director Kyla Pierik.



The site contains an overview of the program and the answers to some frequently asked questions. It also has an application form and a template that can be used to develop a budget. Pierik, who started as executive director last October after running her own business, has also developed a program guide for applicants to use in completing their application forms.

Another development she is really excited about is a new partnership with the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture. She said the Federation is prepared to work with affiliated commodity groups to assist with project planning and financial project reporting. The organization is also prepared to provide help for applicants in filing interim and final reports to Agri-Futures. In certain cases, she said, the Federation will provide interim funding for the cash flow of the project.

"We are trying to eliminate as many barriers as possible that may prevent people from applying," she said.

As administrator of CAAP, Pierik invites applicants to call her office directly at (902) 895-4454 if they have a question during the process. Answering a question at the beginning of the process can often avoid frustration further down the line. "That is something I wasn't aware I could do when I was in business," she said.

Potential applicants should note that multi-year research projects are eligible under the program. While the program runs until March 31, 2014, all projects must be completed by December 2013, so Pierik encourages applicants to apply as soon as possible.

One industry's waste is another's fertilizer

Pilot project looking at potential of aquaculture waste as fertilizer and soil amendment

With the rising costs of chemical fertilizer and shipping and with agricultural sustainability and soil conservation in mind, Newfoundland and Labrador farmers are always searching for innovative and economically viable approaches to farm management.

But a new pilot project may turn out to be a winner for both farmers and the province's growing aquaculture sector.

The project will evaluate the potential of using waste salmon mortalities from aquaculture production to produce fertilizer and soil amendments that can be used by both conventional and organic farmers.

The Agri Adapt Council has approved \$181,950 for the project through Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Canadian Agricultural Adaptation Program.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Agriculture is working with the Institute for Biodiversity, Ecosystem, Science and Sustainability, the Nova Scotia Agricultural College and Guelph University on the project.

Liquid fish fertilizer is a source of nutrients that supplies both the macro and micronutrients required for plant growth. The application of an organic product such as fish silage to soil could have many benefits beyond a fertilizer source.

It's expected that regular applications of the fish fertilizer will improve the quality and structure of the soil and its capacity to hold water and nutrients. The project team also expects it will reduce soil erosion and support a health community of soil microbes.

A recipe for the fertilizer and soil amendment will be developed in the lab and tested on farm trial plots in the province. Local farmers are participating in the project by donating a portion of their farmland for test plots and volunteering time and equipment for soil preparation, planting and application of the product.

The crops will be monitored throughout the growing season and overall crop performance will be evaluated. Disease resistance, soil organic matter, crop yield and nutrient content of soil and crop are among the key measurements to be examined during the study.

The project will determine if it is economically viable to replace imported chemical fertilizer with a liquid fertilizer from salmon waste, taking into consideration improvements in soil quality and overall crop performance and environmental benefits.

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Advancing Canadian Agricultural and Adaptation (CAAP) program is a five-year, \$163 million program with the objective of facilitating the agriculture, agri-food, and agri-based products sector's ability to seize opportunities, to respond to new and emerging issues, and to pathfind and pilot solutions to new and ongoing issues in order to help it adapt and remain competitive. In Atlantic Canada, CAAP is delivered by the following industry-led groups:

New Brunswick: New Brunswick Agriculture Council Inc./Conseil Agricole du Nouveau Brunswick Inc.
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Internet: www.nbfarm.com/nbac-canb/

Newfoundland and Labrador: Newfoundland and Labrador Agri-Adapt Council Inc.
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