



News Release

Agricultural Research and
Extension Council of Alberta

www.areca.ab.ca

FARMING: CAREER CHOICE OF THE FUTURE?

ALBERTA, January 23, 2009 – Many people contemplate a change of career at a certain point. How many, though, would consider abandoning a hectic urban life in favour of a new rural career in farming? And what would they need to know in order to make that happen?

The Agricultural Research and Extension Council of Alberta (ARECA) is currently conducting a survey to determine public interest in returning to the land, and to assess what kinds of training, skills and background information people would require to do just that.

“The number of people farming has been steadily decreasing over time and the age of those left to carry on is increasing,” said Dee Ann Benard, executive director of ARECA. “We need to know what it takes to attract people to the business of farming, and what kinds of tools and information they might need in order to build environmentally and economically-viable operations.”

According to Statistics Canada, the country’s farm population continued to decline between 2001 and 2006 and, like the population as a whole, got older. The overall farm population dropped 6.2 per cent to 684,260 nationally and 40.7 per cent of these farm operators were aged 55 and over.

In Alberta, the 2006 census marked a 7.9 per cent decrease in the number of operating farms during the past five years, for a total of 49,431. Despite the decrease, Alberta has the second-largest number of farms in the country, with the largest number being in Ontario.

“Our province’s contribution to Canada’s agriculture sector is significant,” said Benard. “But if we don’t have new farmers coming into the industry – women, young professionals and new immigrants, for example – the cost of food will soar as we are forced to increase imports to meet our needs and all Canadians will feel the impact.”

ARECA is conducting the survey with a view towards creating a new program to address the training and information needs of those who might consider a career in agriculture. Tentatively titled **FarmCraft**, the program will be delivered by ARECA and its member associations throughout Alberta via the internet, conferences and workshops, as well as mentoring and apprenticeships.

ARECA anticipates offering courses such as:

- tools for getting a farm business started
- what is involved in owning and managing different types of farming operations
- marketing opportunities
- alternative practices
- farm business management
- production management.

Individuals who might be interested in participating in the survey are encouraged to visit ARECA's website at www.areca.ab.ca, where a link to the survey can be found on the front page.

"The more information we are able to gather through the survey, the better our program will be able to meet the needs of those seriously considering a career in farming," said Dr. Ty Faechner, ARECA's research program manager and the leader of the **FarmCraft** project. "There are a lot of benefits to a rural career, but we want to be sure that people are well-informed and have the tools they require to make it a profitable venture before they begin."

The Agricultural Research and Extension Council of Alberta (ARECA) is a not-for-profit organization working with producers to enhance and improve their operations through access to field research and new technology.

Made up of up of 16 member associations focused on applied research, demonstrations and extension in the areas of forages, annual crop and livestock production, ARECA acts as a strong united voice for producers by speaking on their behalf to industry leaders and government representatives.

Each member association delivers programs and develops projects that address the concerns and priorities of producers in their specific regions.

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