

Access Saskatchewan

A Dash of Dirt and a Pinch of Seeds, that's what Arlette Laird is made of

Arlette Laird has cooked up 101 unusual recipes – recipes that gardeners especially will enjoy. In January 2000, the Prince Albert resident published her first book, **The Joy of Planting: A Step-by-Step Guide to Creative Container Gardening**, which offers recipe ideas for planting in indoor and outdoor containers.

Laird worked at a non-profit greenhouse for 12 years. During that time she saw the need for a book that would help people put together attractive, colourful containers, as well as teach them about plants for containers. By October 2000 she had sold 5,000 copies.

She received some help along the way with her business plan and with researching printers and distributors from Gérald Gareau, an economic development officer with the **Conseil de la Coopération de la Saskatchewan (CCS)**, who is located in Prince Albert. Gareau worked in conjunction with WD Client Service officer Donna Préfontaine.

"After the book came out I went to see Gérald about promotional work for the spring," she comments. "I should go back to him now about my business plan to adjust cash flow numbers. It's good to have someone to work with on your plan, otherwise it's easy to let it slide. Having some guidance helps keep you on track."

Laird says she would recommend the Conseil to other Francophone entrepreneurs. "Because I'm part of the French community, I feel more at home there."

Arlette Laird was able to receive help from a CCS economic development officer because Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) contributed up to \$525,000 over three years for the organization to maintain its three Francophone EDO positions in offices in southern, central and northern Saskatchewan in 1998.

"With the economic development officers in place we've been able to reach a far greater number of potential and existing entrepreneurs," points out CCS Executive Director Robert Therrien. "Francophone communities at large have benefited. Without the WD funding this never would have happened."



It's initiatives like this that have led WD to earn honours for its work with Official Language Minority Communities in Western Canada. On Oct. 5, Dr. Dyane Adam, the Commissioner of Official Languages, tabled her first annual report in Parliament. The Department was included on Commissioner Adam's Merit List of Positive Achievements.

Part VII, Section 41, of the Official Languages Act (OLA) states: The Government of Canada is committed to enhancing the vitality of the English and French linguistic minority communities in Canada and supporting and assisting their development; and fostering the full recognition and use of both English and French in Canadian society.

The Commissioner wishes to highlight the worthwhile initiative by Western Economic Diversification in making the effort to set up Francophone community development organizations in each of the four western provinces. These have permanent funding and administer funds to assist small and medium-sized businesses.

In April 2000, WD Saskatchewan region committed up to \$400,000 over three years as a loan loss reserve to the PAGE Credit Union Fransaskois Loan Program. The contribution reduces PAGE Credit Union's lending risk in providing loans of up to \$75,000 to eligible Francophone entrepreneurs across Saskatchewan.

The Conseil de la Coopération received \$90,000 over three years for a loans officer who is a liaison between the Francophone business community, PAGE Credit Union and WD. Discussions are underway in the other WD regions – B.C., Alberta and Manitoba to establish similar funds.

"We assist the Francophone entrepreneur with business plan development in their official language, then we used to say to them, 'Now, go out and find funding,'" explains Therrien. "Now with the Fransaskois loan program, we can offer a funding alternative in French. The program completes that circle of assistance. We are a one-stop business service organization for Francophone entrepreneurs."

The departmental vision concerning the Official Languages Act includes having a Francophone economic development organization in each western province; to increase accountability of these organizations; providing access to capital; and to support economic development initiatives in priority sectors identified by the Francophone communities themselves.



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Sprouting Business Success

They are tasty, organic and you may be adding them everyday to your sandwich. More than likely, the sprouts in your salad came from **Carolinn Sprouts Ltd.** in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan.

In August 1997, Carolyn and Randy Pilling took ownership of a 15-year-old home-based business that produced five varieties of sprouts. Two years later when the time came to expand the business to a commercial operation, they approached **Women Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan Inc. (W.E.)** for a loan. W.E. assists businesswomen with services that include one-to-one business counselling, networking opportunities, resource information and repayable loans up to \$100,000.

The Pillings have added several new varieties to their product line and moved to a 2,300 square-foot building. Carolinn Sprouts produces nine varieties of organic sprouts, including: radish sprouts, broccoli, sunflower, lentil and the more traditional alfalfa and clover sprouts.

"The radish tastes just like a red radish you'd plant in your garden and the broccoli tastes just like the broccoli vegetable," explains Pilling.

The company also produces several varieties of specialty sprouts called mixed sprouts. For example, an onion mixed sprout is a blend of onion sprouts with alfalfa and clover sprouts. Pilling says that the mixed varieties have a mild flavour and are excellent in salads and sandwiches.

Carolinn sprouts are distributed through SERCA Food Service Inc. to hotels and restaurants in Saskatchewan and Alberta. The company has also had their products placed in Saskatchewan IGA grocery stores and with Westfair Foods, who supply food products to outlets including Superstore and Extra Foods stores.

"Ideally what we would like is to have our products available across Canada and the United States," says Pilling. "It takes time though to get a foot in the door. The hard part is to get people comfortable with the product and once they do, they realize the quality of the sprouts."



In October Carolinn Sprouts was present at the Saskatchewan Food and Wine Festival.

"It was awesome to be part of the Festival," says Pilling. "We took samples for everyone to taste and the cooks used some of our sprouts in the salads for the gala banquet."

Terri Parent, Loans Officer with Women Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan Inc. in Saskatoon says she continues to meet with Carolyn to offer business consulting.

"Women Entrepreneurs is very pleased to be part of the development and growth of Carolinn," says Parent. "We see it as a well-rounded entrepreneurial venture and are excited that we could support the Pillings in building a lucrative and successful enterprise."



Though gone are the days when the work of packing and growing sprouts would take up half of the basement of the family home, Carolinn has always been a family business, with the Pilling's three children doing odd jobs when they can.

As the only commercial sprout producer in Saskatchewan, Carolinn Sprouts has four full-time employees and three casual part-timers. Always mindful of the safety of their products, the Pillings have trained staff on stringent sanitation procedures

and put in place one of the world's best food safety programs called Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP).

W.E. is set up independently as a non-profit member organization committed to helping women succeed in business, with offices in Regina and Saskatoon. There are also chapters located in Arborfield, Yorkton, Prince Albert, Swift Current, Humboldt and North Battleford.

Pilling's contact with W.E. also continues on the local level. She is treasurer and a member of the Promotions Committee of the Prince Albert and Area Chapter of Women Entrepreneurs.

Full membership in W.E. costs \$75 and includes benefits such as access to insurance coverage, member referrals, advertising, training discounts and reduced rates at W.E. sponsored conferences.

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Finding the Pot of Gold when it comes to Business Plan Writing

Students in the Entrepreneurship and Small Business program at the **Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST)**, Woodlands Campus in Prince Albert, have found the key to writing a practical business plan. They've tapped into the **Canada-Saskatchewan Business Service Centre (CSBSC)** resource library located at the Prince Albert and District Community Futures Development Corporation office.

"We invited the SIAST class over during our open house for the regional site in September," explains Prince Albert CFDC general manager Wayne Cameron. "They're over here all the time now using it for their business plans."

The library is one of 16 Business Service Centre regional access sites in Saskatchewan. The CSBSC provides them with a collection of basic informational material in the first year, which is updated in the following years. Print library materials and resources available on CD-ROM include: Business Plan Handbooks; the Entrepreneurial Manual series; "How To" reference materials; statistical information and directories such as the Complete Canadian Franchise Guide, the Provincial Business Directory and the Small Business Source book.

SIAST instructor Debbie Suchorab says while Woodlands Campus has a library, it's very broadly based. Her students, who must complete the entrepreneurship program with a ready-to-use business plan, use the regional site at the CFDC for its very specific, small-business oriented, up-to-date materials.

The Prince Albert CFDC's resource collection is the largest business library in the city, according to Cameron. "It was a good move to partner with the CSBSC," he said. "The site rounds out our services to the public and makes us a one-stop centre for business resource materials." He estimates about 80 to 100 clients have used the materials since the Sept. 13-14 open house.

"Our original site in Prince Albert was with the (provincial) Regional Economic Development Authority," explains Emily Cherneski, regionalization coordinator with the CSBSC in Saskatoon. "But the Authority was in transition and people there felt the CFDC was a more appropriate location. The CFDC renovated its space and now we have a storefront location."

Cherneski adds that the CSBSC's core library will remain in Saskatoon because it would be too expensive to duplicate and decentralize all the materials. "The business resource library is just a small part of what the CFDCs do, but the feedback we've received is that the clients are pleased with the business library resources. The partnerships we've

created with the CFDCs and other agencies are working well." When the regionalization initiative is finished across the country, the 13 Canada Business Service Centres will have launched 383 regional sites as part of the Government of Canada's commitment to support economic development in rural Canada. Sites in rural Saskatchewan communities ensure a broader awareness of the CSBSC and its services, as well as those of the host organizations.

"We recognized that the host organizations were already in the business of serving clients," adds Cherneski. "What we've done is augment their existing resources. The CSBSC is focused on the benefit to the end-user. For us, it's all about networking partnerships and increased access to our resources. The result is the economic benefit to the province."

Clients using CSBSC materials will be able to access information directly. They may also call the CSBSC in Saskatoon for help with more complex or specific inquiries. Distance services, including the CSBSC's toll-free telecentre service, the 24-hour Info-FAX and Web site will continue to be provided from the Saskatoon location.

The CSBSC was established in 1994 as a joint partnership between the federal and provincial government to consolidate business information services into one central location. Its mandate is to serve small business by making available the information needed to succeed in today's business environment. Western Economic Diversification Canada and Saskatchewan Economic and Co-operative Development are managing partners of the CSBSC.

Other CSBSC regional sites are: Weyburn, Swift Current, Outlook, Yorkton, North Battleford, Assiniboia, Broadview, Bruno, Estevan, Kindersley, La Ronge, Meadow Lake, Regina (at the Centre for Business Development and at the Conseil de la Coopération de la Saskatchewan for Francophone entrepreneurs) and Tisdale.

There are 13 Community Futures Development Corporations in Saskatchewan - funded by Western Economic Diversification - helping rural communities expand their economies by exploring new approaches to business development and providing access to business resources, counselling and financial assistance.

CFDCs can provide small and medium-sized businesses and entrepreneurs access to loans not normally offered by financial institutions, including loans up to \$125,000 for new and existing small business owners.

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