

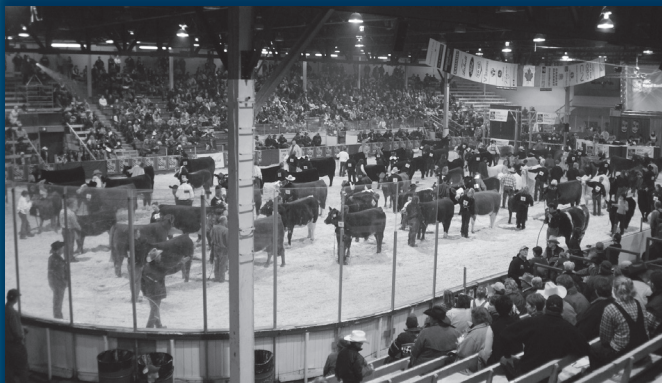
ACCESS

SASKATCHEWAN

April - June 2005

Livestock Show Rounds Up International Exhibitors Electronically

by Colleen Gnyp



Canadian Western Agribition is one of North America's largest annual livestock shows.

Photo courtesy of the CWA.

Canadian Western Agribition (CWA) exhibitors tossed their pens and cheques away in favour of using a new online entry and fee payment system when registering for the fall 2004 livestock show and marketplace.

"Up to this year most entries for livestock were handled manually," says Agribition General Manager Leon Brin.

"Exhibitors filled out a form and mailed it to us with payment. Internally, this entry information was input several times within different departments."

The Regina-based Canadian Western Agribition is one of North America's largest annual winter livestock shows with registration of more than 700 exhibitors and 4,000 livestock. Each exhibitor's name and address, and every livestock entry is recorded and tracked multiple times for accounting purposes, publicity and reporting.

During 34 years of hosting shows, CWA has gained a reputation for profitably producing an annual show. Brin says the main reason they invested in the online system was for greater efficiency and the ability to sustain the position as innovator among the top entry livestock events in North America. A Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) contribution of \$67,027 helped CWA to create the e-commerce system and, as a result of expanding service to exhibitors, preserve its international reputation for marketing Canadian agriculture products and expertise to the world.

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INNOVATION

CWA's New System is User-Friendly

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"We wanted to create a system that was user-friendly for the exhibitors and our staff. Our hope was for 30-40 per cent of producers to use the online system. We were pleased to have 60 per cent of our exhibitors use the system, and of this number, 80 per cent paid online," says Brin.

The system's versatility provided CWA with quick and accurate information, not only for entry purposes, but also to produce stall cards with information on the animal's history and ownership, confirmation reports, show catalogues and mass show numbering for exhibitors to display.

With the ramifications of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), precise record-keeping practices of livestock buyers and sellers take on greater significance. This year, delegations from Iran and China were the highlights among the Agribition's International Business Centre's reported 650 registered guests, who represented 60 nations. Increasing confidence among visiting delegates and potential buyers that livestock exported are safe and disease-free ensures future marketing opportunities for Canadian agriculture products. In past years, Agribition marked more than \$2.4 million of livestock sales at the public auctions and satellite sales.

Following online implementation this fall, Brin says he received overwhelming accolades from producers and other show representatives interested on how the system works and its adaptability.

CWA staff are taking a breather after another successful show. Brin says WD's support ensured an effective upgrade to the entry registration and reporting system to the benefit of Agribition and its exhibitors.

WD supports innovative technologies that boost economic trade nationally and internationally. Canadian Western Agribition's enhanced competitiveness helps increase trade opportunities for the western Canadian agriculture industry, and contributes an estimated \$20 million to the local economy.

For more information on Canadian Western Agribition events, call (306) 565-0565 or visit www.agribition.com. ♦

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Export Marketing ExperTeas

by Colleen Gnyp

Like many entrepreneurs, Sanjay Gupta, president and CEO of **Tea Connexions**, came to a crossroads with his export company.

“When you first start out you do a lot of the work yourself and then you reach a stage in a business where, in order to expand, you have to bring on expertise,” says Gupta. “Bringing on new talent is scary because as an entrepreneur you have to trust this person.”

Gupta and Suruchi, his wife and business partner, own and operate Saskatoon-based Tea Connexions. The company specializes in luxuriously packaged gourmet teas from China and India. When the Guptas started their business more than nine years ago, their office was only 200 sq. ft. Today, their distribution facility is 3,000 sq. ft.

With seven full-time staff, Tea Connexions distributes its products exclusively through a membership-based buying

group of independent and entrepreneurial distributors. It has 200 members in the U.S., Canada, Australia and the Caribbean, and three warehouses in the U.S.

To forge ahead with U.S. expansion, Gupta turned to Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) for assistance to hire recent graduates to work on international trade ventures.

In November 2004, University of Saskatchewan MBA grad Lance LaCroix started as Chief Operating Officer to help oversee U.S. operations, as well as strategic planning, human resources and general operations at the firm's Saskatoon home base.

Gupta says Tea Connexions has grown 1,000 per cent since starting in 2001. The majority of sales come from exports. He anticipates increased export revenues in the U.S. tea industry and other international markets due to rising consumer sales in the specialty estate, flavoured and green tea markets.

LaCroix is the second graduate hired by Tea Connexions with WD assistance. Michele Germain started in May 2004 and is responsible for finance and marketing planning.

“I only have good things to say about WD,” says Gupta. “The assistance allowed me to take a step back and have the opportunity to hire people with a high degree of experience and expertise at a crucial time in the company's development.”

To learn more about Tea Connexions, call 1-877-532-3832 or visit www.teaconnexions.com.

For information on how Western Economic Diversification Canada can help exporters, visit www.wd.gc.ca/export. 🍁



Lance LaCroix (L) and Sanjay Gupta from Tea Connexions.

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ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Riding the Organic Wave

by Heather Waldern Hinds

Glen Neufeld believed so strongly in organic farming that he joined Marysburg Organic Producers Inc. as a volunteer marketing director. This enabled him to better reach consumers who shared his philosophy.

Neufeld and his wife, Anne, had farmed at Drake for nine years when they switched to organic farming in 1989. Seeing a definite need for marketing organic commodities, Neufeld started making sales with the Marysburg group in 1993.

Organic agriculture involves a holistic approach to farming that integrates biological and cultural management techniques. There are an estimated 1,000 organic producers in Saskatchewan.

Neufeld worked as the volunteer marketing director almost full-time by 1997. By then, Marysburg Organic Producers had grown to 44 farmers. To supply the more general requirements of the organic movement, the Neufelds started a home-based business, **Sunrise Foods International Inc.**, in August 1997. Both Anne and Glen were working full-time at Sunrise, while Glen continued to market for Marysburg.

To cope with the workload, Sunrise hired a marketing assistant in 1998 with help from Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD). In 2001, again with WD

assistance, the company hired a quality assurance coordinator to help meet stringent organic industry standards.

“WD played a big role in early years when we needed those positions,” says Neufeld. “Help was critical because it’s hard as a fledgling company to do it on your own.”

In the United States, organic sales have increased by about 20 per cent per year. Sales are also increasing in Europe and Japan. Sunrise “rode the wave” of the increasing organic market, says Neufeld. The company outgrew its home-based business label when it purchased property in 2002 on Airport Drive in Saskatoon and expanded to five employees and about \$8 million in sales.

Sunrise now exports to supply demand in Canada and the U.S., as well as six European countries and Japan. “We look to Saskatchewan suppliers first,” says Neufeld.

To learn more about Sunrise Foods International, call (306) 931-4576, ext. 102 or visit www.sunrisefoods.ca.

For information on how Western Economic Diversification Canada can help exporters, visit www.wd.gc.ca/export. 🍁

