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Business centre receives funds for outreach

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Federal funds will help the International Business Centre at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair promote Canadian agriculture

by KAREN BRIGGS

A centre that provides Canadian farmers with a professional, business-friendly environment to meet with national and international buyers during the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair has received a financial boost.

Last week, the federal government allocated \$150,000 through the Agrimarketing program to the International Business Centre and the Toronto-based fair.

"The funding we're receiving will go towards outreach to other international trade shows and for marketing the Royal," said Richard Buck, whose company, AgriTours Canada Inc. manages the centre for the fair each year. The fair wrapped up on Sunday. "The Canadian government has recently signed new agricultural agreements with Columbia, Ukraine, Russia and China, so Canada will be promoting our livestock at their agricultural shows," Buck noted.

The IBC was established 30 years ago by Margaret Burka, who saw a need to welcome international visitors to the fair. The concept has grown from a ladies' auxiliary, serving coffee and cookies, to a location in the National Trade Centre (which also houses the Royal) where documents can be photocopied and deals can be brokered. Translation services are also available, and the cookies (as well as samples of local produce) are still a staple.

The fair has a long history of attracting international participation by showcasing Ontario farm exports. Last year, approximately 1,000 international visitors and buyers, representing more than 60 countries attended the Royal, with sales to international buyers reaching about \$1 million.

Deborah Walker, IBC Volunteer Coordinator, said, "we hosted individuals from 43 countries at the 2011 fair. We organize farm tours, arrange transportation and accommodations, and facilitate access to the fair."

Seventy-five per cent of the centre's international visitors this year were from Semex Alliance Inc., added Buck. "Genetics is a major part of the business that goes on at and around the Royal Winter Fair," he said. The centre works in conjunction with companies like these "because they're buying from Canada. We also assist in putting buyers together with government officials so everyone is on the same page with regard to import/export regulations."

The grant was one of a number announced by Pierre Lemieux, Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture and Agri-Food on November 10. Other federal allocations include:

- \$650,000 to support traceability initiatives in Ontario's livestock sector;



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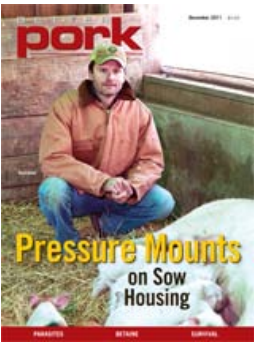
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- \$250,000 for poultry and wheat farmers to increase their export opportunities;
- \$130,000 to Wing's Food Products of Toronto, to enable Ontario wheat growers to market their crop to North American and foreign markets; and
- \$123,713 to the Chicken Farmers of Ontario through the Canadian Agricultural Adaptation Program (CAAP) to enhance the readiness of Ontario's poultry farmers to contain disease outbreaks.

"Ontario is Canada's largest poultry producer. With approximately 2,000 poultry farms across the province, and many partners across the poultry value chain in Ontario, the need for a consistent, agreed approach to address urgent situations is essential," said Murray Booy, Chair of Chicken Farmers of Ontario in a news release from the organization. "Government of Canada funding for this project recognizes that imperative."

Another \$50 million in federal funding is also becoming available through the Agricultural Innovation Program to boost the development and commercialization of innovative new agricultural products, technologies, and processes.

The program will support industry-led science and technology projects with commercial potential, with the aim of increasing employment and revenues, and reducing production costs. **BF**

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