

**PRASPS report for Peace River Prospects Pilot project
February 17, 2000**

PRASPS communication committee, which includes four PRASPS directors and other cross commodity representatives as well as two staff, have created a two page centre spread for the Northern Horizon.

During the six-month funding period we have covered a variety of topics including producer profiles, important events such as the fall sheep-sale forage seminars, various AGMs and a host of issues affecting individual farmers or commodity groups.

The continuing objective of the project is to cover the news, events and projects related, but not exclusively, to the eighteen commodity groups under the PRAD umbrella, and have them published in the Northern Horizon and the region's two daily newspapers.

In December 1999 PRASPS sent a letter to the commodity groups and farm organizations asking them for support for our project. To date we have received promises of support from a handful of these organizations. As these groups meet infrequently and need a board meeting for approvals we are still waiting for further responses, and plan to contact them again.

Many organizations and individuals recognize Peace River Prospects and are willing to be interviewed and supply us with material. Our network of contacts has grown and we have a solid readership.

Our plan to make a smaller tabloid size publication proved to be impractical, however we will have a full agriculture page in both of the region's daily newspapers. This may not be a first, but it has been a long time since news and general information about agriculture and rural life have appeared on a consistent basis in any Peace Region newspaper.

We are told the newspapers have a driver who will deliver the dailies at each driveway - they have purchased special tubes for this. This way we are not relying on Canada Post and people's timetables to make sure they get the paper.

Recently PRASPS held a writer's workshop in Dawson Creek. The purpose of the workshop was to find more writers and reach into the various farming communities to get a variety of news and to encourage what we hope will be a growing group of people interested in writing about agriculture events and news.

There were fifteen people at the workshop representing the communities of Farmington, Doe River, Rycroft - a member of the Peace Value Added Food and Agriculture Association, and both Fort St. John and Dawson Creek. All were interested in writing and they realized they can be paid for this work, not only by PRASPS, but also by other agriculture publications who would gladly receive BC Peace news.

Agriculture producers face a continuing variety of issues and PRASPS has identified a few in its six-year history. These relate to transportation, lack of investment climate, and lack of competitive climate for BC Peace farmers, awareness to the value of food produced in Canada and a host of issues that include food quality issues related to genetically modified foods and the association political issues.

Agriculture news is starting to appear more often in our local papers, but it is not always local news. We are building a relationship with local media that we hope will have the lasting benefit of good contacts within the industry.

Regular agriculture news will let people know about research projects funded each year by PRAD and other funding agencies. There is very little information published about funded projects and therefore there is not as much value attached to the investment, as there should be. The urban public is not aware of the enormous financial impact farming has in our communities and what would happen if it disappeared.

We still intend to publish two Peace River Prospects per month in the Northern Horizon. With our expanded body of freelancers will create a steady body of material for both the daily newspapers. We will also supply story ideas to the papers and they to us. A longer-term goal is to assist local reporters in accessing agriculture contacts and developing consistent agriculture reporting. We know the newspapers are willing to print what we send.

The content will include human interest, reports from various commodity groups, a calendar of events, news and issues facing agriculture and specific sectors, and reports on developments in the industry.

Our intent is to increase agricultural news for the daily newspapers. Where applicable, stories will be sent to specific industry publications.

In both cases we will develop a system that ensures coverage of agriculture news.

During the pilot project we established where the information sources are, developed a writing team and have some regular contributors. In November, we assessed the pilot project. Peace River Prospects has been well received in the community.

The committee has cross commodity representation and is chaired by a PRASPS director. Three other directors participate as well as staff.

PRASPS also maintains a home page, which will be updated and will carry the calendar of events, and a variety of the materials published in the region's papers for Internet viewers.

The published material will be sent to both Federal and Provincial agriculture ministries.

Expected outcomes and benefits to the industry

- Increased awareness about agriculture in general for both rural and urban communities.
- A forum for discussing any issues related to agriculture.
- Funding agencies will gain profile for their contribution to agricultural development.
- Agencies and commodity groups will have a vehicle with which they can meet their funding requirements in terms of reporting on the progress of specific research or initiatives.
- Profile of agriculture in the BC Peace will be elevated and this region of BC will be better known and understood. This may have a positive impact on federal and provincial funders.