

Agriculture

Royal Winter Fair takes centre stage

By ROB SAVAGE
Toronto Bureau

Thomson News Service
TORONTO - Horse shows will be set to a faster pace at this year's Royal Agricultural Winter Fair.

Sue Bundy, marketing services co-ordinator for the Toronto agricultural extravaganza, says efforts are being made to "tighten up" the horse shows.

The shows will run for a shorter time each night as organizers reduce the waiting time between competitions. During the waiting periods, entertainment acts will be used.

"There isn't a dull moment. No lulls in it," Bundy says.

The Royal, she says, is responding to changing public demands.

An extra day has been added to the fair's run to ensure all

agricultural shows get into the schedule.

The Royal, the largest agricultural fair in Canada, runs Nov. 6 to Nov. 18 at the Coliseum at Exhibition Place.

Horse competitions have always proven to be one of the fair's main draws. Classes featured in the competitions will include hunters, Arabians, ponies, open jumpers, hackneys, roadsters, Belgians, Percherons and Clydesdales.

There is also an international equestrian team competition that features teams from the United States, Great Britain, France and Canada. This year, the prize money for the international event has been increased to more than \$350,000 from \$165,000.

A new competition this year is the \$100,000 Triple Crown Series

final for open jumper riders. The top 20 riders from this summer's \$175,000 Triple Crown will take part in the event, which will be shown on TSN.

Another new event is the Sotheby's International Modified Relay for international teams and superdogs.

International horse classes will be followed by superdog races in this event, which sees the scores combined for each horse/dog team. The team with the best overall score wins.

As well, this year's Royal will feature a flower night on Nov. 13, where judge's boxes are decorated in flowers and flowers are presented to competition winners.

"The whole Coliseum will just be a festival of color," Bundy says.

Thousands of livestock - from cows to pigs to sheep - will be shipped to the Royal.

There were 3,842 exhibitors at the Royal last year, with a total of 13, 157 entries. Most exhibitors come from Ontario, although the Royal attracts participants from across Canada and the United States.

The Royal also saw its main competition in Ontario bow out of the race this year. The Canadian National Exhibition dropped most of its agricultural competitions this summer in favor of an educational exhibit called the Farm Show.

But Bundy says she doesn't know if the CNE changes affected the number of entries at the Royal. Officials are still calculating the number of entries for the 1990 Royal.

Farmers' markets are living history

Step into one of Ontario's 80 farmers' markets and step into a piece of living history. Farmers' markets have been with us since the early 1800s, providing growers with an ideal place to peddle their wares and consumers with the opportunity to buy the freshest farm-grown goods available.

The freshness and quality is still one of the biggest reasons people flock to market, according to Bob Cobbleddick, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food market specialist.

"There is a big social element to attending farmers' markets and there is the attraction of enjoying the outdoors and sharing a coffee with your neighbor," said Cobbleddick. "But what keeps most people coming back to a farmers' market are quality, value, variety, and consistency of supply."

"People like the idea of buying food they know was picked on someone's farm the same morning or the day before."

There are farmers' markets across the province and many of them, such as Toronto's St. Lawrence Market and Ottawa's By Ward Market, have been long-established.

"After the explosion of malls about 15 years ago, the downtown areas in some cities saw a slow-down in business. Some cities have used farmers' markets as a way to attract people back to the downtown core," said Cobbleddick, who provides advice and information to cities interested in establishing farmers' markets.

Bryan Charbonneau is a marketing specialist in Northern Ontario, where there has been a renewed interest in farmers' markets in recent years. From five markets a decade ago, now there are nearly 20.

"People come for the freshness of the products and also because they're willing to support the local agricultural community. The social part of it is big. They'll stroll down for a coffee, buy some fresh farm produce, then stick around to chin-wag with their neighbors," said Charbonneau.

"A feeling of camaraderie and co-operation has grown among the vendors. Over the years their marketing skills have improved and by returning to the same spot in the same market, they have developed a regular clientele and an identity in the community," he

said. Many of the markets in Northern Ontario have been established with financial assistance from AgriNorth, a program provided by the Ministries of Agriculture and Food, and Northern Development. Markets also receive funds under Foodland Ontario's Shared Cost Program. They operate under the Northern Ontario Farmers' Market Association.

Specialists like Charbonneau, located in Sudbury, and Bob Chorney in Sault Ste. Marie, work with farmers' markets and associations, providing advice on advertising and marketing as well as designing and laying out their operations to make shopping easier and more appealing to consumers. Chorney has been working with some farmers' markets in eastern Ontario as well.

There are many farmers markets open all year-round, some runs in the summer months, others in the fall. By-laws govern whether they sell only produce, or if meat, cheese, baked goods and arts and crafts can be sold as well. Buy the food Ontario grows during Agri-Food Week, Sept. 30-Oct. 6, and

year-round. Details on where the markets are, when they are open and what they sell are available in the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food's Pick-Your-Own Guide, available by calling this toll-free number: 1-800-ONTARIO.

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Dairy industry disputing government aid figures

MISSISSAUGA - Canada's dairy industry does not get \$2.2 billion in subsidies.

It seems this fact needs to be repeated, perhaps because the actual subsidy of \$266 million doesn't make great headlines. There is no \$2.2 billion handout to dairy farmers.

The recently published \$2.2 billion number is an aggregate measure of support (AMS) estimate from the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade negotiations. The AMS is a controversial estimate that is intended to allow comparisons of support between countries but it has been incorrectly used in media reports as the actual cost of subsidizing the dairy industry.

"The AMS numbers are a theoretical measurement which are almost meaningless when applied to supply-managed commodities," according to John Core, Chairman of the Ontario Milk Marketing Board. "Unfortunately, many people automatically assume any number is a fact once it's published - the most frustrating thing is that the AMS number is being taken out of context and being tossed about in some media as if it is a true cost to Canadians."

The major part of the fictitious AMS figure is any difference between domestic prices and "world prices". Similar analysis would wrongly call any difference between the average Canadian wage rate and a low "world" rate a

subsidy to Canadian workers.

Some countries subsidize milk prices to an artificially low level and the "world" market is a dumping ground for subsidized surplus at fire sale prices. In Canada, the approach has been to have reliable, high-quality Canadian milk and dairy products with consumers paying the real cost in the retail price rather than hiding it in taxation.

What about the facts of Canadian subsidies on milk? There is no subsidy of fluid milk in Canada. The only direct payment from government is \$266 million for industrial milk, and it is offered to lower the consumer price of products such as cheese,

yogurt and butter. This represents 12 per cent of the price received by producers for industrial milk.

Supply-managed commodities have not required the sort of government support necessary for some farm sectors because the system allows farmers to receive fair income from the market. Canada's negotiating position of the GATT has been largely in keeping with the needs of the dairy industry and this support has been appreciated. The Canadian government supports supply management because it has proven to be the most effective and least-cost approach.

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