



Sustainable Cities

## **Canadian-Led Dairy Project in Cuba Wins Major Award**

**Vancouver, B.C. June 4, 2007** – The International Centre for Sustainable Cities' (ICSC) Enhancing Sustainable Dairy Production project in Cuba won the AMEC Award for Sustainable Development of Natural Resources or Protection of the Environment at the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Canadian Awards for International Cooperation.

Presented on May 23 in Fredricton, N.B. by Robert Greenhill, president, Canadian International Development Agency and the Hon. Perrin Beatty, president & CEO, Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, these awards recognize and honour the work of Canadians in developing countries.

“This project is an excellent demonstration of sustainability, and offers an important model for other communities in similar climactic zones,” says Dr. Nola-Kate Seymoar, president and CEO of ICSC.

Through the cooperation of Canada's dairy farmers, ICSC's year-long demonstration project at the Cuban cooperative “CPA 26 July”, in the tiny community of Los Palos, has created sustainable, on-farm nutrition for dairy cows, replacing costly imported cattle feed supplements from the U.S. This has helped the community become more self-sufficient in dairy production – at present Cuba imports half of the necessary dairy requirements as expensive imported skim milk powder.

Best farm management practices have been adopted throughout the project. Farming improvements include 30 hectares of rotational grazing pastures, three hectares of grass/legume “pedestals”, an area for ration crop development and a small feed mill. The “pedestals” are an innovative Cuban design that mixes legumes and grasses in a rotational pasture setting. Grass micro-pastures are separated by 5 foot high hedges of legumes grown under wire trellises that protect the plant from over-grazing. The project also built 100 micro pastures that have electric fencing charged by solar power. Calf rearing is now the responsibility of women members of the cooperative, which strengthens their contributions to the farming operations. Shaded areas with water tanks in the pastures create comfortable conditions for the dairy cows.

The results have been highly successful. In only six months, milk production at the farm cooperative in Havana province increased from 3.5 litres per cow per day, to between 7.5-10 litres per cow per day, resulting in a 140 percent increase in the farmers' income from the sale of milk. Better nutrition caused herd mortality to drop from 50 per cent to zero per cent in six months time.

The International Centre for Sustainable Cities is a Vancouver-based NGO that partnered with Cuba's National Association of Small Farmers -ANAP (Asociación Nacional De Agricultores Pequeños). The project was supported by \$75,000 in funds from the Canadian International Development Agency and \$91,252 in donations from Canadian farmers, farm suppliers (in particular, Gallagher Canada and Gallagher New Zealand) and other supportive Canadians.

Wendy Holm, the B.C. Agrologist who conceived of and managed the project, accepted the award on behalf of ICSC at the Annual Canadian Awards for International Cooperation awards ceremonies last week. More than 80 projects were nominated in nine categories. Dedicated to constructing cooperative, collaborative, capacity building "bridges" between Canadian and Cuban farming communities, Holm's work over the past decade has resulted in the visits of 450 Canadian farmers and students to Cuba in 22 delegations since 1999.

"While it has been a privilege to lead this work," says Holm, "the secret has been its core of farmer-to-farmer engagement. Canadian dairy farmers Bruce Beattie (Alberta), Lorne Hansen (B.C.) and Jim Millson and family (Ontario) deserve all the credit."

Plans are now underway at ICSC to extend this rural model to a peri-urban project, this time in Cuba's eastern city of Bayamo. Because Bayamo suffers from drought, this next project will include the construction of a Canadian wastewater reclamation system to withdraw and treat residential sewage before it enters the Bayamo River. The nutrient-rich water will be reclaimed through Canadian-constructed wetlands technology (big vats of green plants) designed by Eco Tek Ecological Technologies Inc, a private company based in Langley, B.C. This reclaimed water will be used to irrigate newly constructed pedestals and pastures at an adjacent dairy cooperative. The Bayamo project will include a capacity building centre to share this new approach to sustainable milk production with other farm cooperatives and to teach the residents of Bayamo about nutrient recycling - actively involving school children, university students, and the scientific community.

... 30 ...

For more information, please contact Dr. Nola-Kate Seymoar, President and CEO, International Centre for Sustainable Cities (604) 666-2323 or Wendy Holm, Senior Associate and Project Manager, Cuba (604) 417-2434

#### **NOTE TO PHOTO EDITORS:**

High resolution JPG and/or PDF photos of ICSC's Enhancing Sustainable Dairy Production project in Cuba as well as of individual Canadian dairy farmers who participated in the project are available on request.

## **ABOUT ICSC:**

The International Centre for Sustainable Cities (ICSC) is an organization dedicated to catalyzing action on urban sustainability in cities around the world, through practical demonstration projects, peer learning networks and high profile events. ICSC serves as a broker, bringing together the business community, civil society organizations and various levels of government to tackle urban issues. ICSC works nationally, internationally and in its home region, Greater Vancouver, Canada. Over the past 14 years the International Centre for Sustainable Cities has undertaken demonstration projects and worked directly with partner organizations in 13 countries. The organization leads a network of cities worldwide that share best practices in sustainable development, and engages in high-profile sustainability events that provide a forum to galvanize action.

ICSC was founded in 1993 through an alliance among federal, provincial and municipal levels of government, the private sector and civil society organizations and is governed by a Board of Directors from these sectors.

The AMEC Award for Sustainable Development of Natural Resources or Protection of the Environment was presented to ICSC and is representative of the organization's leadership role in sustainability around the world. The Enhancing Sustainable Dairy Production project in Cuba is one example of the innovative projects that ICSC manages.

## **QUOTES FROM CANADIAN DAIRY FARMERS:**

Lorne Hansen farms in Harrison Mills, British Columbia: "I was happy to be part of a project that gave me a chance to see how Cubans have adapted so well to their situation, to have been able to help them with our input and to be part of a project that saw such good results."

Bruce Beattie farms in Sundre, Alberta: "Canada has a long history of good relations with Cuba. Canada has a role to play in the world as a peacekeeper, builder and supporter of people who need help - a generous society of farmers who survived in this climate by helping each other and working together. Supply management provides the cooperative framework that is successful in ensuring Canadian dairy farmers are fairly compensated for their investment of labour and capital. We are unique in the world with that system, but the cooperative aspect is universal among farmers. I am privileged to live in a country like Canada, and if I can in some small way, help those with much less who are ready to help themselves, it makes Canada a better place and me a better person."

Jim Millson and his family operate a fifth generation dairy farm in Enniskillen, Ontario: "The farmer-to-farmer relationship has been the most rewarding part. CPA Julio 26 has become more than just a project - it has become our family hobby. True friendships grow with each encounter and satisfy our mutual passion for improving the art

of farming. It is also really good to know we have made a difference in the ability of the CPA to improve their production capacity. And then, when our hands get too dirty to shake, we have learned to find more meaning in rubbing elbows! “

Gladys Millson, Jim’s wife agrees: “I am very proud to be a Canadian in Cuba because you really feel that they warmly consider us their friends. We have embraced the project as just another challenge for our family farm--with tropical benefits. It’s also nice to see the Canadian flag flying at the CPA on every visit.”

Twenty two year-old daughter Morgan, a recent agribusiness graduate from the University of Guelph, says getting involved in this project allowed her “the opportunity to travel to Cuba, and do something people my age don’t normally get to do. Meeting and working with the members of the CPA has been a very rewarding and wonderful experience.”

Darryl Donneral, a rural electrician and Morgan’s fiancé, has also contributed to the project: “It gives me a great deal of pride to be able to help a nation instead of just a single person. I just wish that I could do more to help.”

## **BACKGROUND ON CUBAN DAIRY SECTOR**

Until the early 1990’s, Cuba’s farm economy, based on sugar, was highly industrialized and dependent on chemical inputs and machinery. The collapse of the Soviet Union - their major trading partner, and the American embargo have forced Cuba to produce most of its food without the aid of chemical pesticides or fertilizers.

Not willing to lower their nutritional targets of one litre of milk per child per day, Cuba developed an ingenious intensive pasture management system using “pedestals” to replace protein in the diet of dairy cows. Despite this, milk production remains low (three to seven litres per milking cow per day) and Cuba imports fifty per cent of its dairy requirements as skim milk powder and relies on corn gluten from the U.S. to supplement protein in dairy rations.