

A food tracking program that really FITS

Every small business owner knows time is money. For a food producer, maintaining accurate inventory lists, monitoring sales statistics, and ensuring seasonal products reach the consumer in a timely manner can be a time-consuming, expensive concern.

But a new system being designed specifically for the local food industry could considerably lessen those concerns.

FITS — the Food Inventory, Tracking and Sales System — was approved for funding in May through the Canadian Agricultural Adaptation Program (CAAP) and a test project is in the planning stages. CAAP funding is managed in

Alberta by the Agriculture and Food Council.

FITS is an industry-delivered web-based program that allows regional producers and processors to list,

track and offer their products for sale.

The test project will be conducted in two phases. **Phase I** involves the development and testing of the live inventory system using local market operators who have a variety of existing inventory and products to sell.

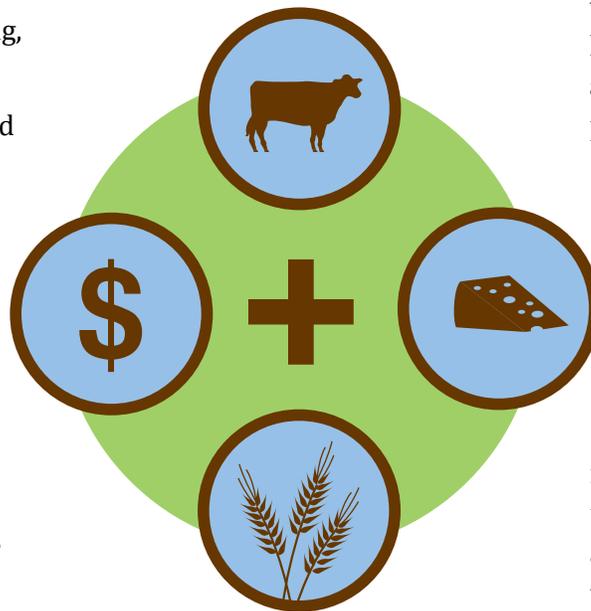
Phase II is the establishment of an online marketplace offering products for sale province-wide.

The FITS system's real-time, tracking element updates inventory as soon as an item is bought by a consumer — removing it from the list and updating sales statistics such as purchaser name and product transaction — all automatically, with no need for ongoing and time-consuming manual data entry.

This time-saving process can result in increased profits and improved business growth.

Planned benefits of the FITS system

1. Simplify your inventory, tracking and sales
2. Forecast and track sales and obtain a more accurate picture of new opportunities



Welcome to Field Notes!

Field Notes is an e-newsletter for local market operators and new entrants to the Alberta farm direct industry. It is for market-focused producers who create and develop new products and enterprises, access new markets and/or add value to existing products.

We hope you enjoy **Field Notes**, your quarterly e-source for information on the Alberta

Agriculture and Rural Development Explore Local initiative. Read on to discover:

- Timely, incisive, and creative ideas to grow your profits
- New product and market opportunities
- Upcoming workshops, tours and industry events

See FITS page 4

Mobile abattoir shows great potential

Last summer, Bert Dening drove a semi-trailer-sized, red meat mobile abattoir through Alberta farm country and this summer he's doing it again — targeting the province's poultry producers this time.

"I think there's more potential for the poultry abattoir than the other one," says Bert, referring to the red meat abattoir, "there's a lot of small poultry flocks out there."

The first mobile abattoir (designed for red meat animals) was a co-project launched in 2008 by Olds College and Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development (ARD). Although expensive to operate, the abattoir

proved so successful it was sold this spring to a northern Alberta community.

The second, poultry-targeted abattoir, also an Olds College/ARD undertaking, has been operating under Bert's direction since early spring and thus far, has proved to be every bit as popular.

The unit is 53 feet long and 8.5 feet wide and contains a cooler and sections to process animals. It can handle 300-500 chickens a day — slaughtered, cooled and ready for sale by the end of the day.



Bert Dening, ARD Barrhead, stands at the entrance of the mobile abattoir.

Another plus for the poultry-based abattoir is that a lot of farm labour can be used, reducing outside labour costs for the small- to medium-sized producer.

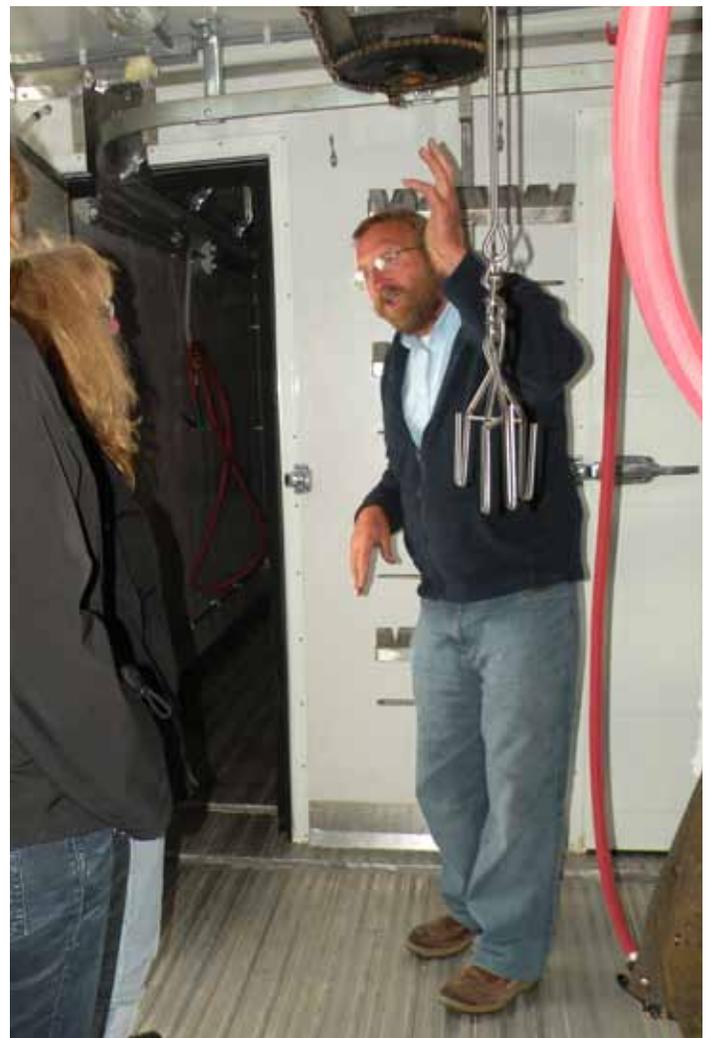
The red meat abattoir averaged about 10 animals a day, and the carcasses needed a much longer cooling time — up to two days. After it was cooled, the meat still had to be transported to a butcher for cutting and wrapping before finally being ready for sale.

For poultry, the butchering process and required equipment is quite different. The birds are slaughtered, plucked and cooled inside the mobile abattoir. The carcasses need only hours to cool to the required 4°C before they can be wrapped and sold. All of which can be completed on the same day, from inside the mobile abattoir.

“It’s not that hard to train people to slaughter poultry,” Bert says, “and having chickens ready for sale on the same day they’re slaughtered is an attractive proposition for most producers.”

Test trials will continue all summer and it remains to be seen if the unit will prove as successful as last year’s red meat abattoir. But early results are positive and there have already been several enquiries about purchasing the unit.

For more information on either mobile abattoir, contact Bert Dening, Business Development Specialist with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, at 780-674-8247. ■



Bert explains the processes and describes the fixtures of the mobile abattoir to an Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development delegation.

FITS

continued from page 1

3. Improve transparency, traceability and efficiency
4. Generate invoices and email them automatically
5. Optimize point-of-sale activity and track product movement through real-time interaction
6. Provide awareness of shipment volumes versus spending

For further information on the FITS test, contact Paul Cabaj at paul.cabaj@gmail.com or 780-636-3366. ■



The FITS local market team: front row l-r: Vince McConnell, Perry Phillips, Paul Cabaj (Perry and Paul are with the Capital Region Local Food Initiative); back row l-r: Ross Drever, Drever Technological Solutions Inc., Cindy Cuthbert, Karen Goad, Margurite Thiessen and Pat Ramsey.

It's the law!

A regular *Field Notes* feature highlighting government regulations which may affect your local market business.

Different legislation may apply to each marketing channel (Alberta Approved Farmers' Market, farm gate, restaurant, etc.) even when the product is the same.

Different legislation may apply to each selling point (municipality, province, out of province, out of country, internet) even when the product is the same.

For more information about this and other government regulations that may affect you, visit the Resources section at www.explorelocal.ca.

Explore Local launches new website

In an effort to better serve producers, processors, chefs and others interested in selling into local food markets, the Explore Local initiative (EL) has revitalized its website (www.explorelocal.ca).

The refreshed site integrates resource material from several other sites including exploredirect.ca, agtourism.ca, dinealberta.ca and sunnygirl.ca. New links, factsheets, EL projects in progress and accomplishments have also been added.

Websites exploredirect.ca and agtourism.ca have been fully integrated, and visitors will be automatically redirected to www.explorelocal.ca.

However, dinealberta.ca and sunnygirl.ca continue to house resources specific to the Dine Alberta program and the Approved Farmers' Market Program respectively. ■

Field Notes is published four times per year and is available online at www.explorelocal.ca. For further information about anything you've read here, or to be included on our email list, please contact Lisa Sharp at lisa.sharp@gov.ab.ca.