



Experts wanted...

by Catherine Morrison

With the Canadian beef industry still reeling from the effects of the recent “mad cow” scare, it probably could not be more timely for Canada’s Food Bureau to be thinking of branching out, as it were, into more plant-based exports.

“Functional foods and nutraceuticals – they’re hot!” says Patty Miller, assistant director for the New Foods and Technology Team, based within Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada’s Food Bureau.

Say what?

Well, blueberries, for example, are a functional food prized – not only because it reminds you of summer when you sprinkle them on your cereal but – because it contains mega-antioxidants, bioflavonoids and something called anthocyanin, reported to be good for the eyes. According to an April 2003 article in the *Wall Street Journal*, studies show “that blueberries offer protection against urinary-tract infections, cancer, age-related health conditions such as short-term-memory loss, heart disease and brain damage from strokes.” Get me some of those little blue beauties!

A nutraceutical, on the other hand, is what you get when you extract a beneficial substance like anthocyanin from a food and put it in a pill.

Recognizing that the market for both functional foods and nutraceuticals has taken off like a rocket of late, particularly as the ubiquitous boomer demographic ages and gets increasingly concerned about its health, the Food Bureau recently put out an RFP for a “Strategic Analysis of Geo-market Penetration for Canadian Functional Food and Nutraceuticals.” In other words, they want to take a look at the potential for selling these plant-based products abroad.

Canada already has strengths in the production of several functional foods and nutraceuticals. “We’re particularly strong in EFAs,” says Miller. Saskatchewan, for example, is a big producer of essential fatty acids in the form of borage and flax crops. EFAs are “good fats,” touted for their role in cardiovascular health, diabetes, brain function, immune function and cancer prevention, just for a start.

But the industry, which is very much science and technology-based, is still new and rather fragmented. Developmental work is going on in various provinces and in a number of federal departments. According to Miller, the Food Bureau hopes that one of the things the market study will accomplish, when the results are shared across departments and jurisdictions, is “to allow us to work in a much more integrated manner in the way we provide market development support to this growing sector.”

In the far more traditional international health care arena, the one that talks in terms of “National Health Accounts, the methodologies used to compile and analyze health expenditure and finance,” Canada was recently given the chance to export the services of a consultant to the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) Health Account Working Group.

The posting, from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), one of several high-profile health and development agencies that created the Working Group in 1998, was placed by CIDA as a “service to Canadian

suppliers.” André Medici, senior economist with the IDB, explains that a Canadian consultant would be hired under the organization’s CANTAP3, a Canadian trust fund, which is “a tied fund to contract Canadian consultants, goods and services.”

National Health Accounts (NHA), according to a January 2003 *Primer for Policymakers*, is an internationally accepted tool for describing and analyzing the financing of national health systems. It allows countries to assess the economic impact of their health policies and programs and thus improve health system performance. To date, NHA has been conducted in more than 50 middle- and low-income countries.

In the Philippines, for example, NHA studies in 1991 and 1997 discovered that decentralization of health care over that period resulted in an increase in the total amount spent on public health care due to increased funding from local governments. Since public health care encompasses such things as immunization, which is felt to benefit not only individuals, but also the community at large, such an increase might well be seen as a positive development.

In Latin American and Caribbean countries, however, NHA has not been as widely and systematically applied as elsewhere. The Canadian consultant being sought will assist the Working Group in “efforts to support LAC countries in institutionalizing the collection and analysis of information about their health care expenditures.”

On a lighter, or perhaps more ceremonial note, it seems that Canada’s Lieutenant Governors have decided they just don’t have all the info they need to guide them on the intricacies of assuming and departing office. At a Winnipeg conference of LGs held in December 2002, somebody had the bright idea of preparing a manual to help incumbents with the chore of transition in and out of public life.

The Department of Canadian Heritage issued an RFP this past June for a contractor to do a study on transitional requirements and prepare a detailed how-to document. But don’t expect to get the job if you don’t have the inside scoop. The RFP gently suggested that the contractor might “well consider obtaining the necessary knowledge required as part of this contract by sub-contracting part of the work to a former Lieutenant Governor” (or someone who had been private secretary to an LG).

There’s one for the instructions on transitioning out. Become a consultant. ~~~

Catherine Morrison, a writer based in Chelsea, Quebec, has been published in the Ottawa Citizen and the Globe and Mail’s print and online editions, as well as in Canadian Consumer, Asia Pacific Magazine, the Edmonton Journal and C.A.R.P. Magazine. She was a full-time writer/broadcaster for CBC Network Television and CBC TV and Radio, Winnipeg and a contributing editor and columnist for Winnipeg Magazine.

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