

Canada's Premier  
Investment Services  
Company



**JORY CAPITAL INC**  
CLICK HERE FOR OUR WEBSITE

**Premium content (subscriber only)** Search today's site for:  Search [Search Help](#) [Search our 7-day Archive](#)

- [News](#) [Entertainment](#) [Opinions](#) [Living](#) [Feature Sections](#) [Archives](#) [Classifieds & More](#) [Services](#)

- LOGIN**  
**REGISTER**  
[Subscribe](#)  
[Web Site Comments](#)  
[Customer Service](#)  
[Front Page](#)  
[Publisher: Andy Ritchie](#)  
[Online Editor: John Sullivan](#)

[Passages](#) [Obituaries](#)

**Special Coverage**



**CONRAD BLACK TRIAL**

**FREE PRESS POLL**

What should Manitoba's new February stat holiday be called?

- Family Day  
 Firefighters Day  
 Flag Day  
 Heritage Day  
 Other

**Blog Central**

- [Bob Cox](#)  
[Gabrielle Giroday](#)  
[Randall King](#)  
[Gary Lawless](#)  
[Dan Lett](#)  
[Nick Martin](#)  
[Mike McIntyre](#)  
[Brad Oswald](#)  
[Paul Pihichyn](#)  
[Mia Rabson](#)  
[Lindor Reynolds](#)  
[Paul Samyn](#)  
[Doug Speirs](#)  
[Ed Tait](#)



**Personal Finance**  
Our guide to your future




Take a tour of our houses...



**Stoneham**

**OLYMPIC BUILDERS SUPPLY**  
Ready to Move Homes Division  
1783 Dugald Road  
1-204-661-8600 or 1-800-665-8666

**Business**

View seven day [Business Archive](#) for previous Winnipeg Free Press stories.

**Comox Valley wants you, if you farm**

Sat Apr 14 2007

LAURA RANCE - RURAL REVIVAL

SPEND a few days wandering around a trade show and you grow accustomed to seeing some oddball marketing premises -- everything from water-filled balloons on an elastic string, to the gadgets that are supposed to make being in the kitchen fun, to the gotta-haves for households and properties.

But there was one booth at the recent Royal Manitoba Winter Fair in Brandon that gives new meaning to offbeat -- a colourful display promoting, get this, farming as a business opportunity. Not only that, but it was actively recruiting farming entrepreneurs to set up business on Vancouver Island, in the Comox Valley to be exact.

If you're a Prairie farmer who has grown a little tired of commodity agriculture's trials and tribulations, the Comox Economic Development Commission wants you.

"We are looking for people to move in and set up operations; people that are looking for a change of pace or change of lifestyle, looking to move out of the commodity farming industry and start up with something is a specialty product adding value to what they do," says John Watson, executive director and leader of the Comox Valley's "economically unconventional, wildly sophisticated" agri-food initiative.

Comox is reviving a concept that's pretty much been drummed out of conversations about farming in Prairie culture -- lifestyle. Imagine having both the opportunity and the reward to enjoy what you do for a living.

Watson says the region has just completed a three-year process identifying and analyzing its opportunities for economic growth. It determined that value-added agriculture and agri-food processing aimed at providing food to the 500,000 people living on the island is its best bet, even beating out tourism.

Even though the Comox Valley is in the heart of some of Canada's most temperate climate and picturesque scenery, economic developers decided that counting on tourism was a non-starter. There was too much competition in that sector.

"If the idea is attracting investment and encouraging economic growth in your community, every community in North America is out there selling their town for tourism purposes," Watson says. "So you are taking your first step as a community from a marketing perspective against tens of thousands of other communities."

There are risks associated with being different, but also rewards. "I can tell you we are the only community marketing agriculture and this type of agriculture in Western Canada," he said. "We're unique, and so we're starting with a fairly significant advantage."

But the Comox Valley has one other advantage that no longer exists in most other parts of Canada. Only one-third of the 100,000 acres suitable for agricultural production in the valley is being farmed. By comparison, more than 90 per cent of the available agricultural land in the Fraser Valley is in production, which means productivity increases are the only way agricultural industry there can expand.

What's more, the Comox Valley is part of British Columbia's agricultural reserve, which means it won't be developed into suburbs or golf courses.

But why farming? Well, for one thing, it keeps the countryside green, maintaining the island's reputation as a nice place to live. Secondly, the type of farming Comox is promoting -- relatively small-scale operations focused on labour-intensive berries, vegetables, dairy or meat products sold in local markets -- attracts and keeps people. The average farm size in the valley is just under 80 acres, which leaves room for a lot of little farmers all buying and selling their way through the local economy.

Land costs more. Watson put the range between \$2,000 and \$15,000 per acre. But relative to its productive potential, it's not much more. Here in Manitoba, potato land is about the highest value land on the landscape and it sells for \$2,000 to \$3,000 an acre.

What's more, Vancouver Island currently produces only about one-tenth of the food its residents consume. Watson said this effort is also about food self-sufficiency.

It's a slick marketing pitch that comes complete with brochures and a free tin of farm-raised oysters. What an appealing contrast to the Prairie farming landscape at the end of a winter fraught with nasty policy squabbles rooted in this region's dependence on raw commodities that must travel long distances to customers.

There is a flip side to that, as well. One of the prerequisites of the type of farming Watson is promoting is people skills. This isn't about understanding machinery so much as it is about managing people and marketing directly to the consumer. That would require a fundamental shift in how a farmer manages the business.

Whether Comox is successful in its bid to lure people from the Prairies to the coast remains to be seen. But even if only half of this rosy picture is true, it's bound to get more than a second look by those considering their options in agriculture.

Google

**GARDEN CITY SHOPPING CENTRE**  
**model search**  
Win a trip to Disney World!  
[click for details >](#)

**Want a New Friend?**



Winnipeg's marketplace to Find, Buy, and Sell stuff.  
Including new animal friends.

**WipStuff.ca**

**AUCTION MART**  
CLICK HERE!

**7 WONDERS OF WINNIPEG**  
WIN A VESPA FLY 50 SCOOTER  
\* PRICE MAY NOT BE EXACTLY AS SHOWN

**ORDER THE HERMETIC CODE**  
HERE

**ReaderPix!**  
Win prizes!  
Send us your pet pix!



**WFP LIVE**  
**Multimedia**  
The year in  
photographs:  
Sports



**Editor's**  
**Bulletin**  
Click here to  
subscribe

**Log Out**

Laura Rance is editor of the Manitoba Co-operator. She can be reached at 792-4382 or by e-mail: [laura@fbcpublishing.com](mailto:laura@fbcpublishing.com).

[Return to Top](#)  
[Return to Business Index](#)

View seven day [Business Archive](#) for previous Winnipeg Free Press stories.

  
email  
this  
story

  
printer  
friendly  
version



## Canadian Senior Discounts

Huge Savings for Canadians Over 50. Join CARP and Save! Only \$19.95

[www.carp.ca](http://www.carp.ca)

Ads by Google - Advertise on this site

© 2007 Winnipeg Free Press. All Rights Reserved.  
The Winnipeg Free Press is a member of the [Manitoba Press Council](#).