
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Agriculture and Lands

FAIR AWARDS PROMOTE B.C.'S AGRI-TOURISM INDUSTRY

VICTORIA – This year's Provincial Fair Awards Program will promote B.C.'s growing agri-tourism industry, Agriculture and Lands Minister Pat Bell announced today.

The ministry will provide \$175,000 to the B.C. Association of Agricultural Fairs and Exhibitions (BCAAFE) so participating fairs and exhibitions can create displays that highlight the diversity of B.C.'s agri-tourism opportunities while competing for cash prizes and the honour of being named the 'Provincial Fair' in their division. The award program funding is in addition to the annual base funding of \$150,000 the ministry provides the BCAAFE.

"Last year's inaugural Showcase of Agriculture program, which promoted the diversity of our agriculture sector, was a huge success," Bell said. "Not only did it raise awareness of our agriculture industry and the people behind it but it also promoted the many fantastic fairs and exhibitions held throughout B.C. These events are when most British Columbians come into direct contact with our farmers and this is how we will raise public awareness about the importance of this industry."

All 47 members of the BCAAFE are eligible to compete in the awards competition. The funding provides start-up contributions so each entrant can develop and promote a display based on local or regional agri-tourism experiences such as visits to vineyards and wineries, on-farm markets, farm and ranch vacations and food processing facilities. BCAAFE and ministry staff will judge the displays and winners will be announced this fall.

Agri-tourism is one of the fastest growing segments of B.C.'s \$10-billion tourism industry. In B.C., fairs and exhibitions attract over 1.6 million patrons each year. Community farmers' markets, which are very popular with tourists, generate \$118.5 million annually to the provincial economy. In addition to the economic activity, agri-tourism venues also raise awareness of the variety and health benefits of B.C.-grown fruits, vegetables and other agricultural products.

"There is plenty of room for growth in B.C.'s agri-tourism industry, and what better way to promote that than through fairs and exhibitions," Tourism, Sport and the Arts Minister Stan Hagen said. "This potential for growth offers great opportunities for both our agriculture industry and a wonderful experience for tourists – whether they are from B.C., the rest of Canada or from around the world."

The competition is divided into three categories, based on 2006 attendance figures. Division 1 is for fairs with less than 3,000 visitors; Division 2 is for 3,000 to 20,000; and Division 3 is for more than 20,000. First-place winners will receive \$10,000 and be designated as the 'Provincial Fair' of the year. Second-place and third-place winners receive \$6,000 and \$3,000, respectively. There are also three honourable mentions of \$1,500.

“This funding is making a huge difference for our member fairs as most can not afford to develop new programs,” said BCAAFE president Jim Levin. “Most of our fairs are run by volunteers and this Showcase of Excellence program has gone a long way in helping them promote their events to a broader audience. Last year, we had 41 of our 47 members enter the competition. From what I’ve heard, I would expect every member will be involved this year.”

The BC AgriTourism Alliance (BCATA) is the agency responsible for developing long-term strategic plans for the industry, including strategic partnerships, quality control standards, market and product development, and education and awareness for B.C.’s agriculture and tourism sectors.

“It is great to see that the BCAAFE has chosen agri-tourism for this year’s Showcase of Excellence program,” Margie Child, Chair of the B.C. AgriTourism Alliance, said. “This promotion complements the many projects and awareness campaigns we have developed and can only help in promoting the great experiences rural B.C. has to offer.”

For more information on the BCAAFE and a list of this year’s fairs and exhibitions, please visit www.bcfairs.ca.

To view a print quality photo of a fair scene, please visit www.mediaroom.gov.bc.ca/DisplayEventDetails.aspx?eventId=358.

For more information about farmers’ markets, please see www2.news.gov.bc.ca/news_releases_2005-2009/2006AL0043-001339.htm.

1 backgrounder(s) attached.

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