FIRST NATIONS GARDENS EXPANSION PROMOTES HEALTHY LIVING

VICTORIA – In the spirit of growing the New Relationship, Agriculture and Lands Minister Pat Bell announced $127,500 in provincial funding, provided through ActNow BC, for the expansion of the First Nations Community Food Systems for Healthy Living.

“Our province is committed to supporting First Nations in achieving economic diversity through agriculture and in promoting the connection between fresh food and good health,” Bell said at the Indigenous Farm Conference and Trade Show in Victoria. “By creating a local, sustainable food system, First Nations can build healthy communities while increasing employment and promoting self-reliance.”

In 2004, the Nuxalk Nation, Bella Coola Hospital, Coastal Healthy Authority and the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands launched a community garden pilot project to study how small-scale sustainable food production could be incorporated into First Nations communities. As a result of this successful pilot, the ministry, the First Nations Agriculture Lending Association (FNALA), the B.C. Aboriginal Agriculture Education Council and band councils from 16 First Nations expanded the project under the title of First Nations Community Food Systems for Healthy Living (CFS).

“The Canim Lake Band believe that to build a healthy community you have to meet their basic needs: sustenance using healthy alternatives; training and teaching them to do for themselves; and breaking down employment barriers by providing people with the tools and support services,” said Pam Theodore, land administrator for the Canim Lake Band. “The ability to use our land base for sustainable and environmentally sound projects will ensure preservation for future generations. Organic practices encompass our basic traditional and cultural values; it is a way of life that our people have practiced for generations. This is how we will preserve our land.”

In 2005, the CFS proposal was designed to assist 12 First Nations in developing community gardens for a total cost of $647,500. The proposal outlines three key components: training/capacity building, food production, and food processing.

“Through ActNow BC, the Province is acting to close the health status gap in First Nations and all Aboriginal people. The First Nations Community Food Systems is one way of ensuring access to healthy, fresh food for aboriginal communities,” said Minister of State for ActNow BC Gordon Hogg. “Together we will work to change the overall health and well-being of Aboriginal peoples in B.C. by encouraging healthy lifestyle choices.”

The initial 2006 funding is currently being utilized by five First Nations communities who have projects underway: Xeni Gwet’n (Nemiah Valley), Canim Lake Band (100 Mile House), Yekooche (Stuart Lake), Nuxalk (Bella Coola Valley), Heltsuik (Bella Bella). The 2007/2008 submission, thus approved, outlines requests from 12 more First Nations in developing community food system plans.
ActNow BC is a partnership-based cross-ministry health and wellness initiative that promotes healthy living choices to improve the quality of life for all British Columbians.

A photo of the funding announcement presentation is available at: www.mediaroom.gov.bc.ca//DisplayEventDetails.aspx?eventId=367

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