



Agri-Business Learning Materials Produced Despite Difficulties

by Ryan Cromb

There's more to farming than just growing crops, as Ukraine's farmers have found out in recent years. With the country moving towards a market-driven economy, finding buyers to replace farmers' one and only customer -- the government -- has been just one of many bumps on the road to reform.

A Canadian team of agri-business specialists, put together by the Ukrainian Resource and Development Centre (URDC) located at Edmonton's Grant MacEwan Community College, has paved the way for a smoother transition. The Agri-Business Learning Project, which was funded in the amount of \$583,000 by CIDA, was basically designed to help Ukrainians help themselves.

The 18-month project, completed in the fall of 1995, came in on budget and produced 600 pages of self-study materials on farm management for use by agricultural instructors, students and farmers. The self-study booklets are divided into five basic subject areas: production (what, when and how), marketing, risk management, managing human resources, and finance.

Each of 15 modules was translated into Ukrainian and adapted to Ukrainian needs. By the end of the project, a core group of agricultural technikum (college) directors and instructors had gone through training sessions to master the material. One thousand copies of each module were distributed to technikums along with copies of three Canadian farm management supporting videos that were dubbed into Ukrainian.

If accomplishing this sounds easy, think again. The project office in Kyiv was shut down by the Ukraine Ministry of Agriculture just as the Canadian team arrived under tight

deadlines. Computer equipment and software were held for a month-and-a-half by Ukrainian customs, resulting in large and unexpected storage bills and a major overhaul of the project schedule.

Translating the economic terminology was a challenge from the beginning. At one point, three different people were translating, each using his own concepts and terminology. Often there was no running water or electricity. And paper supplies ran out. But the end result was worth all the trouble.

Dr. Len Bauer, agricultural management specialist for the project, Don Bushe, an Edmonton-based educational consultant, and Lorne Owen from the British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture, travelled to Ukraine in 1995 to review translations of the modules produced for the project and to teach technikum directors and instructors how to use the material. The six-day Farm Business Management symposium held at the Agriculture College of Crimea, located near Simferopol, was the third of three instructional workshops put on by the Agri-Business Learning Project. The first two were held in Edmonton.

About 30 participants from 18 technikums attended the symposium, the majority learning about Western agricultural business concepts for the first time. Instructors were careful to adopt a descriptive approach in showing how things are done in the West rather than prescribing a remedy to Ukraine's problems. "We began with a slide presentation showing Alberta farms and agriculture," says Dr. Bauer. "We told people 'This is who we are and where we come from. This will help you understand how we think and the way we do things. It's up to you,

however, to pick and choose what will work for you in your particular circumstances.' We repeated this theme throughout the week. It helped us build a bond much more readily than if we had come in and said 'Here's how you do it.'"

Participants gave the symposium an overall rating of 4.85 out of five!

The process of evolution really got under way in November of 1994, when 11 high-ranking Ukraine Ministry of Education officials and directors of

technikums and state farms visited Edmonton for a two-week study tour of Alberta colleges and farms, followed by six top Ukrainian college instructors, who visited Edmonton in February of 1995. The five-day Farm Business Management workshop covered the project's five agri-business modules step-by-step in the classroom. "This group represents the fruit of our labour," said Dr. Roman Petryshyn, URDC Director and overall project manager. "They are our first walking embodiment of this transfer of knowledge."

Translating everything was the main problem until Vitali Ovsienko, an economist and experienced translator was recruited. Ovsienko stressed that translating quality Western texts is the quickest and most effective way to spread market-economy concepts. "It will take years to educate our own professors," he said. "Translating and publishing a good book will reach thousands. We also have to quickly produce texts in Ukrainian for our students to counter the massive russification."

When the project team arrived in Kyiv last May for the third workshop, they had an unpleasant surprise. The Ukrainian Ministry of Agriculture had decided to "relocate" project headquarters, which meant there was no office space. Meanwhile, materials had to be completed in time for the conference which was to begin 12 days later. So the team used the apartment of Bohdan Chomiak, the Canadian project manager in Kyiv, and, with Bauer, Owen and Bushe handing their completed pages to a Ukrainian-trained desktop publishing and graphics staff working on computers 14 to 16 hour days, they managed to get the modules completed in time.

The Canadian project team left behind a staff of four Ukrainians (a translator, editor and two computer experts) who have been trained to work together as a private venture educational desktop publishing unit. Although four computers purchased for the project were instead donated to Kyiv's Agricultural University, a private company -- Klen Publishers -- has been launched to continue translating educational materials into Ukrainian. ●

"Best wishes on the fifth anniversary of the independence of Ukraine."

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Grant MacEwan Community College (GMCC) of Edmonton, Alberta has been involved in projects concerning Ukraine. Since opening its representative office in Kyiv in 1991, GMCC has managed and orchestrated federally funded technical assistance projects, arranged business tours, organized student, faculty and administrator exchanges, and recruited Ukrainian students for GMCC programs.

GMCC's partnership with the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy since 1994 has led to a further increase in project activity, in both Alberta and Kyiv.

