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by EMILY BULMER

SMITHERS - Spring is in the air, and northern farmers are heading into the season with tips on how to grow their profits. Launched by 'Beyond the Market,' an economic development strategy aimed specifically at the food and agriculture sector along Highway 16, the two day Farm Business Plan Boot Camp trained 60 participants across six northern

Jillian Merrick, co-ordinator for Beyond the Market

to have a business plan for every farm. Farmers sometimes get lost in the passion for their product and don't realize they need to gather information that makes a good business concept profitable."

For Merrick, a successful, sustainable farm explains the purpose of the project.
"One of the goals of Farm Management Canada is

community is one that gets paid.

"It is really important that they have to pay themselves a wage, which is something that needs to be built into the business plan at the beginning."

Trisha and Brad Gustafson, owners of Chilako Nubians, attended the workshop in Prince George.

"We raise dairy goats and with the milk, we make goat milk soap. We already have a business plan for a goat dairy and cheesery, so we focused on the soap making aspect of our business during the workshop," recalls Trisha. The Gustafsons have been operating for five years with a herd that ranges from 25 to 60 goats.

"We did an exercise on what the cost breakdown is to produce a dozen eggs. Most of us don't include our man hours, and that's really expensive actually. One thing that really hit home is that our time is worth something. We had already factored in our time with the goats, but Jillian was saying that the

whole farm needs to pull its weight. After the
workshop, we decided to sell the chickens. Chickens
were not something we intended for a business and
through the workshop, we realized how much of a
time sink it is for us. We want to focus our attention
on the goat business or have some downtime."
"This learning doesn't work very well through
distance education or books," Merrick explains. "With
a business plan, it can seem very overwhelming. The
whole workshop is designed to get the farmers to
put pen to paper and do the thinking that is required
to put together a business plan."
Gustafson expands on the value of doing the

workshop face to face

Sharing information important

"One thing that I found was the networking side of it. Farmers are so incredibly busy, so to take time to meet new people and share information about the little things make their farm better is rare – the

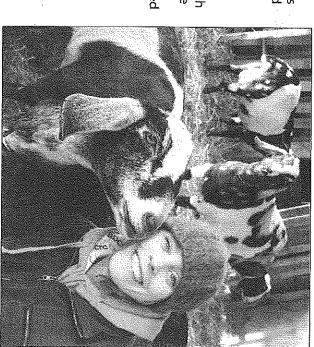
sidebar conversations were really helpful." All the participants leave knowing how to write a

that hard at all.' It is really simple and formulaic, so they walk away feeling pretty confident," says "A lot of them step away and say 'that's not really that hard at all.' It is really simple and formulaic, so business plan.

Other topics covered in the workshop included production planning, inventory and distribution

systems, brand development and marketing.
The other theme of the workshop was ensuring that businesses are market driven, not product

Gustafson took advantage of the opportunity.
"I gave out samples of our soap and did a bit of market research at the workshop. One of the comments was that I need to diversify my products.



A workshop that focused on business plan development for farmers was eye-opening for dairy goat farmer Trish Gustafson. (Photo courtesy of Chilako Nubians)

I've been asked for liquid soap and lotion and I have

started making those."
In addition to the workshops in Prince George,
Vanderhoof, Dunster, Fort St. James, Smithers and
Terrace, Merrick presented to an additional 20

north, but the program has been so successful, we were approached to present it in Kamloops as part of a conference." Merrick hopes to deliver the workshop in southern communities in the fall. participants in Kamloops.
"Our service area is the Highway 16 corridor in the

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