

# App 12-016 - Green Hectares Semi Annual Report - Parkland

Green Hectares – December 2011

# Partners Highlight

## FarmOn.com

A very unique partnership developed between Green Hectares and FarmOn.com that will enhance the outcomes of the Community Connector. FarmOn.com has recently launched a program called Farm Masters. Farm Masters is a community of social learning geared towards serving the needs of young farmers, equipping them with the tools, knowledge and skills needed to ensure business success. As part of the Green Hectares Community Connector, FarmOn.com is going to be a pilot online community. This project has new challenges but with it come many more opportunities to take hold of. Through this partnership Green Hectares expects to develop an online facilitation method that will enhance online communities. Ultimately this can lead to learning that can be applied in real rural communities across Alberta.

## Fort Vermilion

In the fall of 2011, a pilot project for the Green Hectares Community Connector was confirmed by Rocky Lane School Agricultural Program. This RADF funded program will offer off-campus learning opportunities through the operation of a farm/ranch as part of the provincial curriculum, while creating a collaborative framework between the school and neighbouring farming and First Nations communities. Green Hectares is excited for this partnership to identify learning and entrepreneurial opportunities in one of the most remote communities in Alberta. The Fort Vermilion School Division has a strong and innovative approach for the betterment of their community. Green Hectares believes that through this partnership resources can be used effectively for significant impact on the individual, organizations and the community itself.

## Shell Canada

Green Hectares is excited to announce funding support from Shell for the Rural Online Reservation system. Their investment into rural communities will be widespread and create capacity. Specifically, the Rural Online Reservation System will allow all types of public spaces in rural communities to centralize their booking

systems thereby increasing efficiency, reducing volunteer workload, and increasing utilization among many other benefits. Green Hectares expects to have this system online by the Spring of 2012. Due to the commitment of Shell Canada, all the pilot communities will have access to the system and all of its features for the duration of the project. In addition, any other rural community space would be able to utilize the system relatively inexpensively.

# Programs Update

## Brand Changes

A brand review was conducted on Green Hectares and its various programs. The Building Blocks 4 Business and the Practice Pitch were given new names (The Community Connector, and The Entrepreneur Exchange respectively). The Six Degrees Database was temporarily given a new name (E-Resource Centre) as the term database was a point of confusion for many of our potential partners. Until the database/hub is near complete and can be more clearly defined, this place holder name will change to something relevant and appropriate for the stakeholder base. The Green Hectares brand (as well as the brands for the various programs) will be further developed and evolved as they are tested in the coming year.

## Entrepreneur Exchange

The Entrepreneur Exchange Operational plan was completed in the first phase which includes a responsibility matrix, start-up action plan and workflows. The operational plan includes the strategy to identify panel members, facilitators and participants. This document will be folded into the overall operational plan which will also include risk management, research and evaluation, risk management and additional critical paths where needed. Promotion and marketing of the Practice Pitch (Entrepreneur Exchange) began at FarmTech in January. A venue for the first Practice Pitch (Entrepreneur Exchange) has been confirmed for Farm and Ranch in at Northlands

Expo Centre and the second event is currently in discussion with the Calgary Stampede.

## The Community Connector

### *Develop The Building Blocks 4 Business (Community Connector) program*

The Building Blocks 4 Business (Community Connector) operations plan has been completed for phase one. The document includes an overview of the program, action items for all four remaining phases of the project and a responsibility matrix. Community partnerships have been established with Strathcona County, Parkland County and Fort Vermilion. In addition we are currently partnering for a Community Connector with FarmOn.com to utilize these concepts with an online community. Presentations and discussions have been held with four communities in southern Alberta to secure a fourth pilot. Finally, Green Hectares anticipates offering the opportunity to any community space that wishes to participate, however we will offer this once the systems are set up and have been tested. Pricing for this type of opportunity will be influenced by true costs of the program (rather than the pilot pricing) and the Green Hectares sustainability plans.

As part of the planning process the Community Connector components have been identified as Sirolli Facilitation, Rural Reservation System, Speakers Bureau, Rural Tech (including the mobile computer labs) and the E-Resource Centre (when it is launched in the fall of 2012). Additional components can be added to further create depth and increase economies of scale for all components.

Green Hectares has been researching potential partner organizations within communities and public community spaces in an ongoing manner, and to date have developed a significant list. Green Hectares has hired the Sirolli Institute to train our organization on enterprise facilitation. This is a major change as we have eliminated the position of Building Blocks 4 Business (Community Connector) manager. Green Hectares will utilize the mentoring and experience of the Sirolli Institute for the organization and in particular the community facilitators. Currently Green Hectares is already revisiting the plans established as outlined in phase two to enhance the Building Blocks 4 Business (Community Connector) plan where it is the intention to set up strong research and evaluation processes, key communications strategies, enhanced financial strategy, risk management and critical paths.

*Purchase and set up computer labs*

With the support of Agrium, Green Hectares has purchased the operational equipment for its needs in partnering communities. Currently Green Hectares is in possession of 24 laptops (4 computer labs of 6) including the travel cases. IT will be handled by Bridge Business and Technology Inc. Currently the software package, pricing, security, shipping expenses and timelines, administration access and draft care/logistics have all been researched and will be added to the operational plan. In addition, draft schedule for future mobile equipment purchases has been completed. Risk management will be defined in phase two.

## E Resource Centre

*Complete database discovery process*

Light Maker presented their results from the Discovery Phase and a proposal for the Build Phase which was accepted by Green Hectares. The 6 Degrees Database (E Resource Centre) operational plan is 70% completed which is scheduled to be completed in phase two. It is anticipated that it will be completed with workflows by the end of phase two with a refinement in phase three once the platform has been built.

*Develop strategy for collecting database content and begin to implement*

A tool for finding and prioritizing nodes of resources has been developed. Through the discovery process with Lightmaker, a tool will be developed where Green Hectares can point it at various partner sites so that it can catalogue the types of resources, content topic areas and depth of information. This tool will be created by the end of phase three so that by the time of implementation Green Hectares can develop a body of knowledge among our partners and key information sources.

Additionally, the database will contain various interactive options where an individual user and/or knowledge expert will be able to suggest relevant content. The community facilitators will take on the role of adding content found at a local community level. As the platform is built out to a greater degree, Green Hectares will take these information channels, refine their use and combine with other communications tactics to create opportunities for information to flow into the platform using a variety of methods.

*Develop strategy for database engagement*

A framework strategy for the platform engagement has been developed. However this will be refined in the next phase as the Build Phase begins. Green Hectares will be working with Lightmaker's recommendations for this strategy. Economies of scale have been identified among other Green Hectares programs the Building Blocks 4 Business (The Community Connector) and the Practice Pitch (The Exchange). Existing external partnership and sponsorships will be engaged (once the first few builds are complete) to develop a critical mass. Additional complementary partnerships will be determined once clear information gaps, and needs are established. In addition, the Green Hectares board has started a process to engage key stakeholders to sit on a committee regarding this platform.

## Best Practices

### Hiring Process

During the hiring process for the Community Facilitators Green Hectares used methods that leveraged the partnerships with the municipalities already in place. By working with these community's administration, human resource departments and word of mouth, extremely qualified applicants are now being considered and hired for these positions. It became very clear in the first phase that hiring individuals at a slower pace was very important for the connectivity within the community.

### Equipment Purchases

In the first phase of this project it was decided to divide the computer labs. After reviewing our results from our Broadband project (The Rural Road Show) it was evident that class sizes and propensity for participants to bring their own computers warranted a computer lab size of six as opposed to 11. This decision has allowed for greater flexibility within the communities, allows for a better use of the equipment, and allows for greater exposure for our sponsor (Agrium) of the labs.