

# Dairy Information on the Internet

## 1. Grab a mitt and get in the game

Rarely a day passes when we don't hear or see some reference to the Internet. The banks, magazines, newspapers and even small, local businesses encourage us to visit their websites. Alberta Agriculture and many other organizations and agribusinesses have sites packed with useful farm management information. Any farmer interested in staying informed and competitive should consider getting connected.

According to the 1996 Census of Agriculture, 27% of Alberta dairy farms were using computers in making management decisions. For many of these producers, getting connected may be a fairly simple matter. For others, it may require the purchase of a more capable computer. Here's a quick guide to help you 'get in the game'.

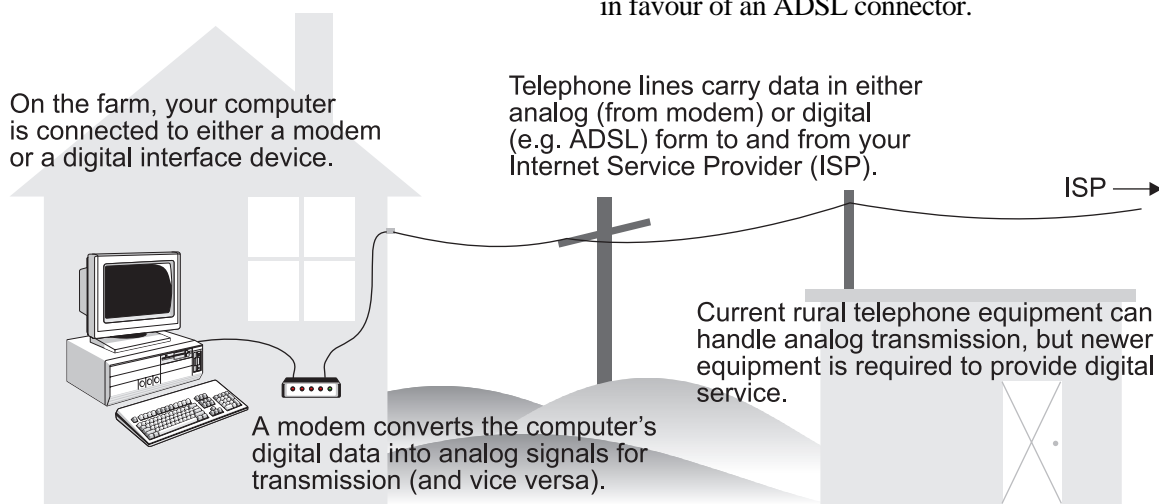
### Computer

With apologies to Apple Macintosh® fans, we'll confine our discussion here to the use of 'IBM compatible' personal computers (PCs). Your computer must be capable of running Microsoft Windows 3.1® which means it must have a 386, 486, Pentium, or equivalent microprocessor. You should have a minimum of 8 megabytes (Mb) of random-access memory (RAM) and 10 Mb of free space on your hard-disk drive. If you will be running Windows 95®, you should have at least 10 Mb of RAM and 10 Mb free on your hard-disk.

### Modem

To access the Internet over you telephone line, you will require a modem. One of the greatest frustrations in using the Internet today is slow communications – most non-corporate users currently connect at rates of 28.8 - 31.2 Kilobits per second (Kbps : K = thousand). To minimize your frustration, if you need to buy a new modem you should purchase one capable of transferring data at 56 Kbps. These '56K' modems come in two varieties: one type uses a technology called 'x2'; the alternative is 'K56flex'. Yours should be of the K56flex variety for a couple of reasons. First, this technology is likely to become the worldwide standard. Secondly, Telus, our Alberta telephone company, is supporting K56flex and expects to offer support for this technology across Alberta by mid-1998.

Whenever you buy new computer equipment, you have to accept that it may be obsolete within a few years. This is no less true for modems. If you own a 14.4 or 28.8 Kbps modem, you might want to replace it with a 56K model when K56flex service becomes available. By 1999, Telus hopes to offer Internet access across the province at rates in the order of 1 - 2 Megabits per second (Mbps : M = million) using a technology called ADSL (Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line). When that service becomes available, you'll want to discard your obsolete 56K modem in favour of an ADSL connector.



## Internet Service Provider

To use the Internet, you need to contract with an Internet Service Provider (ISP) who provides the link between your computer and the rest of the world. For those who live in rural communities, an important consideration in choosing an ISP is the cost of the call from your phone to theirs. If you need to pay long distance charges for this connection, find another ISP. Telus offers toll-free local numbers from every location in Alberta so their TELUS *PLANet* service is worth considering. You'll find information about this service in the front of your telephone directory.

TELUS *PLANet* sign-up and subscription charges are typical of those offered by other ISPs. Initial set-up costs \$25 and the monthly charge depends on the amount of time you want to spend connected to the Internet: \$9.95/month allows you 5 hours/month of connect time; \$24.95 gives you 60 hours. With both plans, overtime is charged at \$1.50/hour.

## Software

When you sign up with an ISP, they will provide you with setup instructions and the software you require to get started 'surfing the net'. Typically you will be given Netscape Navigator<sup>®</sup> which is one of the two most popular Internet 'browsers'. The other is Microsoft's Internet Explorer<sup>®</sup>. Both browsers include components which allow you to exchange e-mail, participate in newsgroups and explore the World Wide Web (WWW or simply 'the web'). Once you have installed a browser, you can download the latest version of either, for free, from the company's site on the web (their 'website').

## Website and e-mail addresses

Every website address is registered as a URL - a Uniform Resource Locator. For example, the URL of my company's website is:

<http://www.prolivestock.com>

Each segment of this URL is significant:

- http stands for hypertext terminal protocol, indicating the method by which data will be packaged for transmission;
- www indicates a site on the World Wide Web;
- prolivestock is the unique identifier we have chosen;
- com is one of a few 'top-level domains', suggesting that our company is commercial. Other top-level domains include net, org and edu. You can probably guess what types of organizations would use these. Canadian organizations operating in more than one province can use ca as their top-level domain; those operating in a single province must use a province code as well - ab.ca, bc.ca, etc.

Taken together, prolivestock.com is our 'domain name'. Domain names are also a part of e-mail addresses. For example, my e-mail address is:

[steve@prolivestock.com](mailto:steve@prolivestock.com)

If TELUS *PLANet* is your ISP, your e-mail address will be something like:

[masons@telusplanet.net](mailto:masons@telusplanet.net)

When you get connected, send me a message at either of the 2 e-mail addresses above. I'll reply with a list of sites where you'll find valuable information related to dairy production and management.

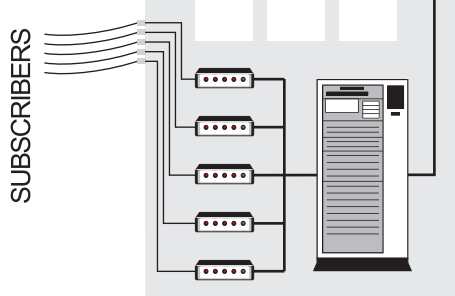
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Your ISP will communicate with subscribers through a bank of modems and digital interfaces. High speed 'T1' telephone lines provide the links to the ISP's Network Service Provider.



Network Service Providers such as AT&T, Sprint and MCI provide the Internet 'backbone', communicating at speeds in the 40-650 Mbps range

