

Healthy Hunting

By: Graeme Hamilton

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MONTREAL -Put away the granola and tofu, Quebec is marketing a new kind of health food -- freshly killed game.

In a government-funded advertising campaign launched this week, the provincial federation of hunters has set its sights on environmentally conscious city-dwellers who might normally shudder at the thought of pulling a trigger.

"Hike and grocery shop at the same time," reads one newspaper advertisement over the word "Hunting" and the address of a Web site address explaining why it is good to hunt. Another appeals to Quebec's large population of natural-food lovers with a simple: "Eat organic." The last in the series says, "Popular for the past 3 million years."

"We want people to realize that hunting has a lot of benefits," said Annie Guertin, spokeswoman for the Federation quebecoise des chasseurs et pecheurs. "We want to say, since you are already in nature, if you love wildlife, you like to be in this milieu and you like meat ... hunting is healthy when it's practised in a way that respects nature and the environment."

The campaign has the full support of Quebec's Department of Natural Resources and Wildlife, which is paying about one-third of the cost. An association representing Cree hunters and trappers is also a partner.

"The goal of this campaign is to encourage people in urban centres to consider hunting," said Eric Santerre, a department spokesman. "It is also important to encourage a new generation of hunters. Younger people are perhaps less interested in hunting, and this campaign is trying to make the activity cool."

Ms. Guertin said the nutritional value of wild game surpasses that of meat from the butcher, but one Quebec producer of organic chicken and pork questioned the effectiveness of federation's message. Natasha McNicoll, owner of Les viandes biologiques de Charlevoix, said her customers are very concerned that animals are treated humanely.

"If you talk to someone who eats organic, the first thing he will ask is how the animal was killed, because people are very aware of that," she said. "They want to be sure the animals are not mistreated. I don't know, but getting a bullet in the head is not the same thing."

Other provinces have also sought to revive interest in hunting. Last year, British Columbia began appealing directly to women and young people in an effort to attract 20,000 new hunters by 2014.

The province has seen its number of hunters fall by half since 1981.

Quebec has actually experienced a recent increase in the number of hunters, Ms . Guer tin said, but the pastime still suffers from an image problem. "There's an impression

that hunting is practised by the less educated," she said. In fact, the ranks of avid hunters include doctors, business executives and politicians, although the latter do not like to talk about it for fear of losing votes, she said.

Louis-Gilles Francoeur, environmental journalist for Le Devoir and an avid hunter, said the advertising should strike a chord among Quebecers.

"There is a return to nature," he said. "People are moving away from this urban environmentalism that is disconnected from the laws of nature, the animal-defence movement."

A spokesman for the Quebec wing of Greenpeace called the hunters' advertising campaign positive.

"It shows that the forest can serve a purpose other than logging," said Isabelle Monette, who also welcomed the focus given to eating organic meat.

In Quebec, there are 475,000 active hunters out of 1.1 million licence-holders. The Natural Resources Department says the activity generates millions of dollars for outlying regions and creates the equivalent of 3,200 full-time jobs. The department says hunting also helps maintain a balance in wildlife populations.

BCWF ALERT

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