

REGIONAL DISTRICT
OF BULKLEY & NECHAKO

Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako

AGRICULTURE PLAN

2012



“A WORLD OF OPPORTUNITIES
WITHIN OUR REGION”

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**REGIONAL DISTRICT OF BULKLEY-NECHAKO
AGRICULTURE PLAN
2012**

APPROVED BY THE RDBN BOARD OF DIRECTORS JULY 19, 2012

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The RDBN would like to thank everyone that contributed to the development of the Agriculture Plan. This includes everyone that took the time to fill out a survey, attend the regional workshops, and attend the working group meetings. A special thank you goes to the working group members.

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| | |
|--------------------|--|
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| Mark Fisher | Bulkley Valley Farmers' Market Association |
| Megan D'Arcy | Pacific Northwest Poultry Association |
| Manfred Wittwer | Northwest Premium Meat Co-op |
| Kandice Kerr | Fort St. James Farmers' Market |

Stakeholders, Organizations and First Nations that provided input into the Plan:

Agricultural Land Commission
BC Assessment
Burns Lake Band
CN Rail
Department of Fisheries and Oceans
ICBC
Ministry of Agriculture
Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations
Northern Health Authority
Northwest Premium Meat Co-op
Tl'azt'en First Nation

SUMMARY

This document has been prepared to support and strengthen the agriculture sector within the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako. The goals of the plan include the identification of regional agricultural issues and investigation of practical strategies to address constraints and opportunities. The Plan was developed through a comprehensive consultation process guided by a knowledgeable working group composed of Regional District representatives, agricultural experts, and local producers. Referrals were sent out to stakeholders, Provincial Ministries, municipalities and First Nations for review and comment. First Nations and stakeholders identified in the consultation strategy were invited to attend a series of workshops held around the region. In addition, two surveys were created in order to gain an understanding of the thoughts, perspectives, and ideas of agricultural producers and consumers in the region. The survey results were a critical input into the plan development process and had notable influence on the content of the plan. There were 81 producer surveys completed, and 123 consumer surveys completed. The survey results are summarized within the Plan document and are attached to the document as an appendix.

A copy of the Agriculture Plan is available on the Regional District's website: www.rdbn.bc.ca or a copy can be requested from the Planning Department. The Agriculture Plan also has a Facebook page where information regarding regional agriculture is routinely posted.

The Agriculture Plan document is divided into three sections.

- Section 1 contains background information and statistics regarding farming in the region. It also includes information on governance structures and regulations, and the survey results
- Section 2 contains a discussion of the many issues impacting agriculture. The issues are divided into four categories: land issues, regulation based issues, development and resource issues and marketing issues.
- Section 3 contains recommendations to the Regional District Board and others in a position to take action in support of agriculture.

Supporting the availability of local food for residents, and maintaining and improving the economic viability and profitability of agriculture are the goals of the agricultural planning process. Agriculture is a fundamental component of the region's character and economy, and the local agricultural sector in the region is changing. Increased global competition and increased production costs have driven down prices and reduced the consumption of local food products. This combined with increasingly strict government regulations results in an increasingly difficult operating environment for farmers. Many farmers are leaving the industry or are rethinking traditional agriculture models.

Profitability remains the greatest challenge to agricultural production within the region. Opportunities include exploring niche markets, promoting local food consumption and expanding traditional markets. Government can support local agriculture by streamlining regulatory processes, facilitating support programs and ensuring the agricultural land base is protected for farming purposes. For agricultural producers, the adoption of a proactive and collaborative approach is critical in order to remain competitive.

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Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako
AGRICULTURE PLAN

SECTION 1: BACKGROUND



1.1 Introduction

The Board of Directors of the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako (RDBN) recognizes the significant importance of agriculture to our region, now and in the future. Agriculture is a significant component of our history, our economy, and our culture. The availability of locally produced foods contributes to our health, quality of life, and independence from distant suppliers. Agriculture is responsible for providing and maintaining the aesthetics and views that we enjoy and that help define our region, in addition to the important role agricultural lands play in providing habitat for many species of wildlife. The agricultural way of life helps define our character and our values.

The regional agricultural industry must be economically viable and sustainable to thrive in the long-term. The region's agricultural producers are facing increased competition and increased production costs. Food production and distribution has become globalized, and the sale of food to consumers is becoming increasingly dominated by large retail chain stores whose business model does not include the purchase of local products from small producers. These factors have driven down the prices paid to producers for agricultural products, and has drastically reduced the consumption of local food products. This situation is particularly challenging for the small agricultural producers in our region given the regions unique challenges related to population density, soils, climate, and increased production costs. It is becoming the norm for agricultural producers in the region to supplement their income in order to survive.

The long-term health and vitality of the agriculture sector is a critical component of our region's future success, and quality of life for our residents. Given the importance of agriculture to our economy, our character, and our way of life, the Regional District Board has made the development and implementation of this Agriculture Plan a priority. Many of the challenges facing agriculture are beyond the ability of the RDBN to independently address in any substantive way, and are well beyond the scope of this plan. However, the RDBN, and this plan, have a role to play in raising awareness of the issues and actions that may be taken, facilitating the consumption of locally produced foods, and ensuring that the RDBN's land use planning decisions support the future success and viability of agriculture in the region.

The development of this Agriculture Plan has focused on researching and discussing with the local community, the following primary issues.

- The state of the local agricultural sector in the region.
- The opportunities and challenges that the agricultural sector is facing.
- The achievable and practical actions that can be taken by the RDBN, the Province, and others to help achieve the following:
 - an increase in the amount of agricultural products produced in the region,
 - an increase in the local consumption of locally produced agricultural products, and
 - securing the long-term viability and prosperity of the agricultural sector.

It is intended that the Agriculture Plan will serve as a resource that provides ideas, information, and a common direction to the following primary users regarding agriculture in the RDBN.

- Agricultural producers and processors, including their associated groups and organizations, who can use the Plan to help develop ideas and recognize opportunities.
- The provincial and federal governments, who can use the Plan to ensure that their resources and regulations are managed in a manner that supports agriculture.
- Educational institutions, that can use the Plan to identify ways to meet the research, education, and training needs of the agricultural sector.
- Economic development agencies and organizations that can use the Plan to develop ideas for projects and strategies that are in support of agriculture.
- All other persons who may benefit from the facts, discussion, and ideas contained in the Agriculture Plan, and who may use this information to further the purpose of the Plan.

The RDBN will use the Plan in the following manner.

- To ensure that long range planning, and the regulation of land use and development, is managed in a manner consistent with the direction provided in the Plan.
- To ensure that decisions regarding the use of the RDBN's resources are made in consideration of the recommendations made in the Plan.

1.1.1 Agriculture Plan Organization

Section 1: Background

Section 1 of the Agriculture Plan contains the information that serves as the background information to Sections 2 and 3 of the Plan. This includes an introduction to the plan and the planning process, a discussion of associated studies and reports, demographics and statistics related to the plan area and agriculture, a discussion of government regulations and regulators that impact agriculture, a list of associated businesses and organizations, and reports of the RDBN producer and consumer surveys.

Section 2: Discussion of Issues

Section 2 contains a discussion of the issues and opportunities that relate to increasing the production and consumption of local agricultural products. These issues are divided into 4 categories: land issues, regulation issues, marketing issues, and agricultural sector organization. This section provides the discussion and rationale for the action plan that is outlined in Section 3.

Section 3: The Action Plan

Section 3 contains a list of goals based on the discussions in Section 2, and a list of specific actions and recommendations designed to help achieve those goals. This section is organized according to the specific goal with recommendations organized by group or agency responsible for the actions identified.

1.1.2 Planning Process

The process to develop the Regional District Agriculture Plan was comprehensive and inclusive.

Step 1: Preliminary Referrals

The following agencies, organizations and stakeholders were sent letters informing them of the development of an Agriculture Plan for the RDBN, and asking for their input into the plan development process.

Local Governments:

| | |
|------------------------|----------------------------|
| Village of Burns Lake | District of Fort St. James |
| Village of Fraser Lake | District of Houston |
| Village of Granisle | Town of Smithers |
| Village of Telkwa | District of Vanderhoof |

First Nations:

| | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Cheslatta Carrier Nation | Lake Babine First Nation |
| Moricetown Band | Nadleh Whut'en First Nation |
| Nak'azdli Band | Nee Tahi Buhn Band |
| Office of the Wet'suwet'en | Saik'uz First Nation |
| Skin Tyee First Nation | Stellat'en First Nation |
| Takla Lake First Nation | Tl'azt'en First Nation |
| Ts'il Kaz Koh First Nation | Wet'suwet'en First Nation |
| Yekooche First Nation | |

Government Departments, Ministries, and other Agencies:

| | |
|--|------------------------------|
| Agricultural Land Commission | Ministry of Agriculture |
| Ministry of Environment | Northern Health Authority |
| Department of Fisheries and Oceans | Fraser Basin Council |
| Invasive Plant Council | Ministry of Energy and Mines |
| CN Rail | BC Hydro |
| University of Northern BC | College of New Caledonia |
| Northwest Community College | Insurance Corporation of BC |
| Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations | |

Economic Development Agencies:

Community Futures (Nadina)
 Community Futures (Stuart-Nechako)
 Community Futures (Fraser Fort George)
 Bulkley-Valley Economic Development Association
 Lakes Economic Development Association
 Southside Economic Development Association

Producer Groups and Associations:

| | |
|---|--|
| Fort Fraser Livestock Association | Cluculz Lake Livestock Association |
| Northern Interior Dairymen's Association | Bulkley Valley Dairymen's Association |
| Groundbreakers Collective (Smithers) | Smithers Farmer's Institute |
| Tatalrose Farmer's Institute | Nechako Valley Food Network |
| Punchaw Cattlemen's Association | Sinkut Mountain Cattlemen's Association |
| Bulkley Valley Cattlemen's Association | Lakes District Cattlemen's Association |
| Pleasant Valley Cattlemen's Association | Skeena Stockmen's Association |
| Vanderhoof Farmers' Market | Lakes Public Market |
| Heritage Market (Burns Lake) | Pleasant Valley Community Market |
| Southside Market | Bulkley Valley Farmers' Market Association |
| Skeena Regional Cattleman's Association | Fort St. James Farmers' Market Association |
| Nechako Valley Regional Cattleman's Association | |
| Fort Fraser Chamber of Commerce (supports local market) | |

Step 2: Creation of an Agriculture Plan Working Group (APWG)

At the beginning of the plan development process a working group was created to provide input to staff and ultimately the Regional District Board regarding the content of the plan, and the plan development and public consultation processes. The APWG consisted of the following members:

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| Lance Hamblin | RDBN Chairperson, Director for Houston Rural (2011) Hamblin Acres, Houston (2012) |
| Stoney Stoltenberg | RDBN Director, Smithers/Telkwa Rural |
| Tom Greenaway | RDBN Director, Fort St. James Rural |
| Shirley Hamblin | NW Invasive Plant Council and Poultry Producers Assoc. |
| Jerry Peterson | Nechako Valley Regional Cattlemen's Association |
| Herb Neville | Skeena Regional Cattlemen's Association |
| Janik Heer | Bulkley Valley Dairymen's Association |
| Alan Martens | Northern Interior Dairyman's Association |
| Andrew Beuzer | Nechako Valley Food Network |
| Mark Fisher | Bulkley Valley Farmers' Market Association |
| Megan D'Arcy | Pacific Northwest Poultry Association |
| Manfred Wittwer | Northwest Premium Meat Co-op |
| Kandice Kerr | Fort St. James Farmers' Market |

The following RDBN staff persons were involved on the Working Group.

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Jason Llewellyn | RDBN Staff, Director of Planning |
| Amy Wainwright | RDBN Staff, Planner |
| Daniel Sturgeon | Planning Technician Summer Student |
| Corrine Swenson | RDBN Staff, Strategic Development Analyst |

Step 3: Consumer and Producer Surveys

At the beginning of the plan development process, two surveys were created in order to gain an understanding of the thoughts, perspectives, and ideas of agricultural producers and consumers in the region. The survey results were a critical input into the plan development process and had notable influence on the content of the plan. The detailed survey results are contained in Section 1.5.

Step 4: Regional Workshops

Once a draft plan had been prepared by staff in close consultation with the APWG a series of workshops were held throughout the region. These workshops were attended by persons with knowledge and experience related to agricultural products production or consumption. The workshops were designed to generate discussion, and obtain feedback, regarding the issues and draft recommendations identified in the draft plan. The workshops were attended by 51 persons and were held in Smithers, Burns Lake, Vanderhoof and Southbank. All agencies, organizations and stakeholders identified in Section 1.1.2 were invited to the workshops.

The results and input received at the workshops was reviewed by RDBN staff and the APWG, and the draft plan was amended based upon the input received. The summary of each workshop can be found in the Appendix.

Step 5: Referrals on Draft Plan

All agencies, organizations and stakeholders identified in Section 1.1.2 were sent a copy of the draft plan and asked for their input into the content of the plan.

The results and input received as a result of the referrals was reviewed by RDBN staff and the APWG, and the draft plan was amended based upon the input received.

Step 6: Formal Board Review and Acceptance

The final draft of the plan was sent to the Regional District Board for formal acceptance and direction regarding plan implementation.

1.1.3 Background Reports and Studies

OBAC Agriculture Sector Strategy

The Omineca Beetle Action Coalition (OBAC) was formed in 2005 with support from the provincial government to promote sustainable development and resiliency in the region, which has been devastated by the effects of the mountain pine beetle epidemic. This epidemic is presenting long-term challenges to timber harvesting, which is the economic base in the OBAC region. The OBAC is investing resources into economic sectors such as agriculture in order to diversify the economy and strengthen communities.

The OBAC Agriculture Sector Strategy was released in July 2009, which was followed by an Interim Action Plan released in August 2009. The OBAC Agriculture Strategy was developed from input provided by many stakeholders from the OBAC region. The purpose of the strategy is to identify what actions need to be taken by senior government to strengthen and diversify the local agricultural industry. The strategy also identifies the actions that local governments and other organizations or individuals can take to assist in the achievement of this goal.

The OBAC Agricultural Sector Strategy identified four objectives to help achieve the regional vision:

1. Diversify and strengthen the agricultural sector.
2. Form stronger partnerships across the agricultural sector.
3. Increase the capacity to train and recruit the required work force.
4. Increase public support for the sector and interest in locally produced high quality food.

To achieve these objectives the following five recommendations were developed:

1. Develop infrastructure that supports the agricultural sector and removes barriers to its further development and diversification.
2. Attract new entrants to the industry and enable access to training and education for existing and new members of the sector.
3. Strengthen the industry by increasing collaboration across the sector and by forging partnerships and communication links with First Nations, local communities, governments, health, and education agencies.
4. Support value-added and specialized product development and the development of provincial, national and international markets for these products.
5. Increase the demand for locally and regionally produced foods.

The purpose of the Agriculture Sector Interim Action Plan is to identify what work can take place immediately to ensure high priority items are addressed and affected organizations are engaged. OBAC does not have the mandate or resources to take action itself, but it will actively encourage the appropriate organizations to achieve OBAC recommendations. The Action Plan identified the following five interim actions to be of immediate importance:

1. Work with regional partners and the Province to develop a solid business case and proposal for funding of agricultural support officers in the region.
2. Convene a working group of regional partners to prepare communications material about the opportunities for agriculture in the region.
3. Put measures in place to encourage the increased consumption of local food, the local marketing of regionally produced food, the increased accessibility to affordable, healthy, local food, and the increased consumption of local food by public and private institutions.
4. Work with the Province and local partners to undertake an assessment of the opportunities for expanding the regional greenhouse industry.
5. Establish baselines and track progress.

Both the OBAC Agriculture Sector Strategy and Interim Action Plan are important resources for the Regional District's Agriculture Plan. The Regional District supports the agricultural objectives of OBAC and has developed the Agriculture Plan accordingly.

In addition to making "local food" presentations throughout the region, the following initiatives are currently being pursued by OBAC as part of the Agriculture Sector Strategy and Interim Action Plan:

- **Northern Agriculture Research Initiative**

On November 4, 2011, The Northern Agriculture Research Initiative released an RFP to conduct research within three broad themes: Forage, Pasture and Local Foods. The goal of the Northern Agriculture Research Initiative is to improve the capacity and profitability of the agriculture and agri-food sector of northern British Columbia. It seeks to do so by supporting agricultural research, development and training in northern BC. The \$60,000 funding for this research was provided by OBAC.

- **Business Plan for a Regional Food Hub: A Plan to Build the Capacity of Our Local Food System**

A lack of marketing infrastructure (e.g., aggregation, storage, packing, processing, distribution) is a critical gap in north-central BC. The purpose of this project is to prepare a business plan to assess the viability and risk of establishing infrastructure required to connect producers and buyers in the region.

- **Enhancing Northern Grain Production through Applied Research And Community Engagement**

This project will address two fundamental goals to build capacity, competitiveness and profitability of the grain-sector of the region: 1) to build applied agri-research capacity that is connected to producer-identified needs to ensure that research objectives are pertinent to northern producers; 2) to enhance the resilience of agri-production systems in relation to current and future production risks by characterizing crop variety adaptive capacity and production potential.

- **PAg Credential** (Dr. Bill McGill, UNBC and Brent Barclay, MAL)
To date:
 - 1) A listing of all potential courses and their descriptions has been provided to the credentials committee of BC Institute of Agrologists
 - 2) The committee has reviewed them all and requested complete syllabi for about 20 questionable courses.
 - 3) The requested syllabi have been provided to the committee
 - 4) The committee is now reviewing the syllabi of the questionable courses.
- **Agroforestry**
 - Introduce the concept of an agroforestry community of practice and the goals of the project;
 - Present local and regional examples of agroforestry operations, and future opportunities; and
 - Develop a framework for guiding the learning activities to be implemented in the coming year.
- **Farm to School Program**
OBAC staff continue to work with Northern Health to establish the Farm to School program in several schools in SD91.
- **Beyond the Market** www.beyondthemarket.ca (see below)

Beyond the Market: Growing the North

Beyond the Market: Growing the North aims to build, strengthen, and diversify the agriculture and food service industries from Valemount to Terrace in British Columbia. The project links farmers, ranchers, purchasers and consumers in the region in an effort to identify the barriers to the local food industry and encourage collaboration and entrepreneurial development to overcome them.

Beyond the Market is a collaborative partnership between Community Futures of Fraser-Fort George, Community Futures Nadina, Community Futures 16-37, the Omineca Beetle Action Coalition, the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George, and Community Futures Rural Economic Diversification Initiative.

Beyond the Market project goals:

- Create an inventory of food producers, distributors, commercial consumers and value-added processors in the region
- Identify existing food storage and distribution infrastructure.
- Assess the feasibility of a regional food distribution system and value-chain opportunities
- Bring producers and purchasers together to network and share information
- Implement local food purchasing pilot projects in commercial institutions

- Host networking and learning events, including a large regional procurement event
- Identify potential new markets and value-added ventures
- Communicate and share the project learnings

The project recognizes that growing numbers of people are eager to purchase fresh produce directly from local farms and farmers' markets. However, the vast majority of food eaten in the region, and elsewhere still comes from supermarkets, restaurants, and other sources that do not commonly purchase from local growers. The challenges to the development of a local produce industry relate to factors such as seasonal availability, small-scale production and dispersed supply, limited processing and distribution capacity, a consumer emphasis on price and ease of purchase, long-term purchasing contracts, a cumbersome regulatory environment, and the use of pre-processed food by many institutional consumers. The *Beyond the Market* project plans to address many of these barriers and facilitate new and expanded agricultural industry growth.

The project includes the following components.

- The creation of an asset inventory that identifies the type and volume of produce that is grown in the region, identifies the needs of food purchasers in the region, and identifies the infrastructure that exists to support a regional food distribution system.
- Networking and communications are seen as key components of the project and its success in addressing the challenges in developing a local produce industry. The project includes networking and workshop events based on producer and purchaser learning needs, farmer-chef connection events, regular newsletter and website updates, and a process to link key stakeholders across the region.
- The project will attempt to answer a number of questions regarding the feasibility of addressing the regional storage, distribution, and processing infrastructure challenges which are barriers to the growth of the local produce industry. Could the region support a food distribution business? Could farmers work cooperatively to establish a food storage facility? Are there opportunities for value-added processing?
- The project may include initiatives to support local purchasing pilot projects, identify leaders among food service entrepreneurs and managers, assist in navigating food safety regulations, provide local purchasing directories, educate farmers on commercial purchasing policies, share and promote successes, provide media and community exposure to local farmers, promote the businesses and organizations that buy 'buy local', share lessons learned with all stakeholders, and extensive community outreach and engagement

Beyond the Market has developed a website which focuses on marketing, networking, capacity building, and education in support of local agriculture. There two major projects planned for 2012: the New Farm Development Program and the Beef Value Chain Project.

The following are the goals of the New Farm Development Program:

- To support the development of agricultural training and internship programs for new farmers within the region;

- To promote the region's agricultural capacity to potential farmers in the region and students in targeted agricultural education programs in BC and Alberta;
- To support the new farmers in developing business and technical skills to access new markets; and
- To improve access to the region's farmland for new farmers.

The following are the goals of the Beef Value Chain Project:

- To work with the grass-fed beef cluster to assess and develop new and expanded regional and provincial markets for grass-fed beef;
- To work with the grass-fed beef cluster to develop marketing and education materials to raise the profile of grass-fed beef to consumers and producers; and
- To support the grass-fed beef cluster in developing business and technical skills and supply chain efficiencies to access new markets.

Growing Our Community: The potential for agricultural expansion in Fort St. James

The *Growing Our Community* report was prepared in 2008-2009 for the District of Fort St. James as a resource to help increase community capacity to develop and expand the agriculture sector. The information within this report is intended to enhance the ability of District Council to make informed decisions about local agriculture. The report provides an overview of local agriculture, identifies opportunities, and recommends strategies to support, encourage and expand local agriculture. These recommendations include: linking greenhouse heating facilities with forestry operations, a permanent location for the Farmers' Market, diversification of the local livestock industry, and the establishment of a local "Centre of Excellence and Innovation in Northern Agricultural Education".

The British Columbia Agriculture Plan: Growing a Healthy Future for B.C. Families

Released in early 2008, the BC Agriculture Plan focuses on meeting and benefiting from environmental and climate challenges and ensuring that innovations will drive a competitive agriculture sector. It provides a vision and direction for sustaining farm families and improving profitability through direct farm marketing. The Plan was developed over a period of two years with extensive public and agricultural sector consultation. The Province recognizes that agriculture in BC is at a crossroads in responding to pressures to produce local healthy food in a globally competitive market while satisfying consumer demands for environmentally sensitive and quality products. The BC Agriculture Plan outlines 23 strategies as a path to the continued growth and development of an economically viable and resilient agriculture and food sector. The following strategies were developed while considering the health of British Columbians, climate change mitigation, environmental sustainability and a growing economy.

Producing Local Food in a Changing World

1. Promotion of BC agriculture and food products at the provincial and local levels.
2. Implement initiatives to strengthen community food systems.
3. Implement initiatives to improve childhood health using BC agriculture and food products.
4. Promotion of human, plant and animal health, and food safety.

Meeting Environmental and Climate Challenges:

5. Implement initiatives to improve environmental management in the agriculture and agri-food sectors.
6. Implement approaches for farmers to receive benefits for ecological goods and services (EG&S).
7. Address climate change and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from food production and processing.
8. Integrate needs of agriculture in provincial water management policies and programs.
9. Optimize forage production for livestock grazing on rangeland.
10. Enhance and coordinate province-wide, invasive plant management.

Building Innovative and Profitable Family Farm Business

11. Ensure that programs intended to mitigate business risks meet the needs of BC's diverse agriculture sector.
12. Implement sector-based strategic plans.
13. Review farm property assessment and Provincial Sales Tax (PST) policy as it applies to agriculture.
14. Assist the agriculture industry with human resources, succession planning and new entrants.
15. Strengthen current extension services.
16. Establish an industry-led, self-sustaining agri-food and bio-products innovation centre.
17. Represent BC agriculture interests through partnerships with the federal government and other jurisdictions.

Building First Nations Agricultural Capacity

18. Facilitate First Nations participation in agriculture initiatives.
19. Develop programs for First Nations at postsecondary institutions to build agricultural skill sets.

Bridging the Urban/Agriculture Divide

20. Increase awareness and interest in agriculture and food among BC youth.
21. Preservation of agricultural land for future generations of farm and ranch families.

22. Implement strategies to minimize conflict between rural and urban residents.
23. Increase agricultural industry input at the local government level.

Ranching Task Force

In response to numerous years of economic difficulties, the Ranching Task Force was assembled in July 2009 to address the sustainability of the cattle industry in BC. The group was comprised of both cattle industry and government representatives. Commissioned by the Ministry of Agriculture, the group was tasked with creating a report identifying key issues and opportunities facing the ranching industry in British Columbia, and to make recommendations to ensure that this industry remains strong, vibrant and sustainable. The Ranching Task Force was focused on developing recommendations to resolve challenges facing the industry.

To achieve these objectives, the Ranching Task Force reviewed policies, regulations and legislation affecting the cattle industry, identified immediate industry priorities (non-regulatory), and identified actions to be taken by industry and government to ensure industry sustainability.

The Ranching Task Force identified the followed goals to be achieved by industry and government:

- Adhere to a set of standards for production that will make B.C. producers leaders in the production of quality beef;
- Significantly increase the number of B.C. finished cattle going into B.C. value-added markets; and
- Support national efforts to pursue beef sales in regions of the world that are experiencing significant growth in consumer demand for beef (Russia, China and European Union).

In 2010, in response to the Ranching Task Force's recommendations, the Province of BC outlined a 4-point action plan in May 2010. The four-point plan briefly consists of the following:

1. Provision of \$2 million in provincial funding to the ranching industry to strategically invest in domestic and export market development opportunities.
2. Continuation of the Beef Cattle Industry Development Fund in perpetuity. (Originally scheduled to cease in 2014).
3. Raise the profile of ranching within government.
4. Implementation of regulatory and policy changes across seven provincial ministries.

These actions are intended to increase competitiveness and improve sustainability of the ranching and cattle industry.

1.1.4 Food Security and Food Self-Sufficiency

Food security and food increased food self-sufficiency are not necessarily synonymous. Food security means guaranteed access to nutritious, safe and culturally acceptable food for all people. Increasing food self-sufficiency through the growth of local and regional food production and delivery systems would certainly help increase food security. However, food security for the RDBN cannot be achieved to a notable degree through local food self-sufficiency.

Support for local food production and the connection to local consumers increases the sustainability of the local economy and minimizes the environmental and social impacts of shipping food long distances. There are clearly many social, economic, health, and environmental benefits associated with increasing local food self-sufficiency. However, a strategy of relying on the production and consumption of local foods to achieve food security is not practical or responsible in the context of the RDBN given the region's capacity for food production.

Achieving food security through local production in the RDBN would require extensive infrastructure such as cold storage facilities and greenhouses, which would require notable amounts of energy for their operation. It would also require significant changes to consumer food preferences. Food security in the context of the RDBN must include the continued easy access to foods grown out of region. However, this does not mean that reliance on imported foods should not be minimized, in terms of amount and distance travelled.

Food security and increased food self-sufficiency issues were raised at virtually every APWG meeting, and was a common theme in the consumer surveys. The growing interest in local food security issues, and the awareness of the social, health, and environmental benefits of local food production and consumption represents a very positive social change that should be encouraged and capitalized upon.

1.1.5 Climate Change

The potential secondary effects of global climate change may be important to agricultural productivity in the near future. Evidence exists that links increased greenhouse gasses, temperature and changes in precipitation to changes in agricultural productivity. If global climate change continues unabated, global food production will be negatively affected by the end of the 21st century (Ostry, 2010). Even if greenhouse gas emissions were rapidly reduced, the existing emissions will have a continued effect on global climate. This uncertainty demands increased resiliency by agricultural producers.

Data shows that BC's climate has warmed in recent decades, with changes in temperature and precipitation in southern BC exceeding global average changes. It is predicted that these trends will continue and that precipitation patterns will shift to produce wetter winters and springs and drier summers in most regions. In addition, extreme weather events such as droughts and floods are likely to increase in severity and occurrence. These changes will directly and significantly affect agricultural production in BC, and in the RDBN. Over shorter time scales,

these changes may be beneficial and allow a wider variety of crop production in the RDBN. However, the long-term impact of food production in the RDBN associated with climate change is not known. It is also noted that diminished yields in the US will also have a significant impact on food security in BC because the bulk of imports of vegetables, fruit and nuts come from the US (Ostry, 2010).

Agricultural production itself is a significant contributor to global GHG emissions, from decomposition of organic matter, methane from ruminants, and use of fertilizers. More intensive farming methods and meat and dairy production are increasing in prevalence as demand for a “western diet” increases. In Canada, the main emissions-generating agricultural activities are animal production, cereals production and on-farm fuel use. BC is not a large contributor of agriculture based GHG emissions when compared to other provinces such as Alberta, Saskatchewan and Ontario. Only 4% of BC’s annual emissions from 2006 were attributed to agriculture, the majority of which were attributed to animal production and manure off-gassing (Ostry, 2010). However, agriculture in BC is challenged with reducing GHG emission from a range of sources including livestock, manure, fertilizer application, farm building and engine emissions (BC Agriculture Plan).

Land use policy plays a large role in providing appropriate incentives to ensure agricultural land retains its potential to sequester carbon and participate in bioenergy opportunities while balancing the need for food production and economic activity in rural communities. The provincial government envisions that the increasing adoption of beneficial management practices could result in farms supplying carbon credits to other industries unable to reduce GHG emissions.

1.2 Regional Farming Information and Statistics

The RDBN is situated in north central British Columbia, covering an area of slightly less than 73,300 square kilometers, or 7.6% of the province's land base. The region's geography is characterized by the rolling high terrain of the Nechako Plateau, bordered by the rugged mountains of the Skeena Range to the west and Omineca Ranges to the northeast.

The ecosystem of the RDBN is dominated by the sub-boreal spruce zone. The climate is continental, characterized by seasonal extremes of temperature, ranging from average highs and lows of 22 and -15 degrees Celsius, respectively. The primary

growing season is two to three months long and the mean annual precipitation ranges from 450 to 890 millimeters. The climate of the higher elevations is more extreme with a very short, cool growing season, long and cold winters and snowpack ranging from one to four meters.



Figure 1: RDBN

The RDBN contains eight member municipalities: the Town of Smithers, the Districts of Fort St. James, Houston and Vanderhoof and the Villages of Burns Lake, Fraser Lake, Granisle and Telkwa. Rural areas are divided into seven electoral areas. The following First Nation's traditional territories are located within the RDBN:

| | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Burns Lake Band | Cheslatta Carrier Nation |
| Lake Babine Nation | Moricetown Band |
| Nadleh Whut'en First Nation | Nak'azdli First Nation |
| Nee-Tahi-Buhn Band | Saik'uz First Nation |
| Skin Tye Band | Stellat'en First Nation |
| Takla Lake First Nation | Tl'azt'en First Nation |
| Ulkatcho First Nation | Wet'suwet'en First Nation |
| Yekooche First Nation. | |

Neighbouring jurisdictions to the RDBN are the Regional Districts of Kitimat-Stikine to the west, Central Coast to the southwest, Cariboo to the south, Fraser-Fort George to the east and Peace River to the northeast. The northern boundary, at the 56th parallel, borders with the remote Stikine Region.

The RDBN straddles two major watersheds in the province:

- The Nechako River arises from the Nechako Plateau and flows north toward Fort Fraser, then east to Prince George where it joins the Fraser River. Its main tributaries in the region are the Stuart, Endako, Chilako and Nautley rivers. The Nechako is one of the main tributaries of the Fraser River, although most of its flow has been diverted through the Coast Mountains (as a result of the Nechako Reservoir) to the Kemano generating station.
- The Bulkley River is 257 km long with a drainage basin covering 12,400 square km. Much of the Bulkley is paralleled by Highway 16. It flows west from Bulkley Lake, between Burns Lake and Houston, and joins with the Morice River near Houston. The Bulkley then continues north past Quick, Telkwa and Smithers before joining with the Skeena River near Hazelton.

The main rivers of the RDBN are all prone to flooding under certain weather conditions. In 2007, the Nechako, Skeena and Bulkley rivers all exceeded their 50-year return period flows during the spring season and caused extensive flooding in low lying areas, many of which are used for agricultural purposes.

The major economic driver of the region is the forestry industry, providing the dominant basic income source in virtually all areas. In all regions, (except for Electoral A surrounding the municipalities of Smithers and Telkwa), forestry provides upwards of 40% of basic after-tax income. Further to this, the region's economy suffers from a lack of diversification as compared to other regions of the province. As such, regional economic vulnerability to the forestry sector is very high (Horne 2006).

2006* census data shows a total labour force of 20,670 persons in the region, with an employment participation rate of 69.5% and an unemployment rate of 10.3%. The agricultural sector in Bulkley Nechako consists of 935 employees that work on farms and 45 others employed in support activities for farms, according to the 2006 Census. There are also approximately 30 employees in the fishing, hunting and trapping subsector. The area's total farm population is estimated at approximately 2,658 persons, representing about 7% of the total regional population. Agricultural activities in the region primarily involve dairy production, livestock rearing (cattle ranching), and forage production. (*2011 census data for labour statistics is not yet available.)

As of 2011, there are 365,623 hectares of land in the RDBN (4.8% of the overall area) within the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR). There are approximately 5,542 individual privately-owned parcels of land within the ALR, with 2,361 of these, or 148,219 hectares being actively farmed according to 2011 BC Assessment land use data.

1.2.1 BC Assessment Data

BC Assessment data is the most current indication of agricultural land use activities in the RDBN. While it does not replace a thorough windshield survey, it is up to date land use

information that provides an indication of the amount of land currently in agricultural production or used for agricultural purposes. BC Assessment Land Use Codes are typically used for taxation purposes, but do not accurately reflect active farm status. It is important to note that the process to obtain Farm Status through BC Assessment is a voluntary process, and farmers may decline to go through this process to have their farmland classified as such (although these persons would constitute a small minority of farmers). Further information on BC Assessment can be found in Section 1.4.2.

1.2.2 Census Data

Members of the Agriculture Plan working group have expressed limited confidence in Census data being reflective of actual activities. Their concern is that it does not accurately reflect agriculture in the region. Despite this, it is the only statistical data that is available that reflects the character of agriculture in the region.

Census Data used is from the 2011 Census of Agriculture:

<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/ca-ra2011/index-eng.htm>

Additional statistical data for the area may be found in the Ministry of Agriculture & Lands *RDBN Agricultural Overview*,* available on line:

http://www.agf.gov.bc.ca/resmgmt/sf/agoverviews_2006census/Bulkley_Nechako_Ag_Overview.pdf. (*Please note that this document does not include data from the 2011 Census.)

Census data uses the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) to categorize farms by industry group. NAICS is used throughout Canada, the United States and Mexico to provide common definitions and statistical framework. More information on the classification system is available at the following website: <http://stds.statcan.gc.ca/naics-scian/2007/cs-rc-eng.asp?criteria=1129>

| Agricultural Land Use by Electoral Area | | | | | | | |
|---|----------------|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Agricultural Land Use in Hectares (2011 Census) | Electoral Area | | | | | | |
| | A | B | C | D | E | F | G |
| Land in crops (excluding Christmas tree area) | 10,789 | 1,505 | 1,829 | 6,842 | 8,010 | 27,700 | 2,353 |
| Summerfallow land | 84 | 18 | 0 | 0 | 84 | 217 | 0 |
| Tame or seeded pasture | 4,883 | 1,078 | 955 | 4,068 | 3,433 | 14,159 | 972 |
| Natural land for pasture | 25,500 | 7,824 | 3,686 | 15,551 | 30,197 | 28,913 | 12,641 |
| Woodlands and wetlands | 0 | 2,531 | 1,520 | 0 | 7,404 | 0 | 960 |
| Area in Christmas trees, woodlands and wetlands | 4,789 | 2,531 | 1,520 | 2,910 | 7,404 | 8,522 | 960 |
| All other land | 1,277 | 709 | 0 | 0 | 1,667 | 4,056 | 427 |

Table 1: Agricultural Land Use by Electoral Area

| Livestock on Farms by Electoral Area | | | | | | | |
|--|----------------|----|----|----|----|-----|----|
| # of Farms Reporting Livestock (2011 Census) | Electoral Area | | | | | | |
| | A | B | C | D | E | F | G |
| Beef cows - Farms reporting | 77 | 22 | 18 | 39 | 56 | 142 | 32 |
| Dairy cows - Farms reporting | 15 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 4 | 6 | 1 |
| Sheep and lambs - Farms reporting | 22 | 9 | 3 | 3 | 8 | 19 | 5 |
| Pigs - Farms reporting | 11 | 6 | 0 | 7 | 6 | 18 | 1 |
| Horses and ponies - Farms reporting | 102 | 22 | 18 | 39 | 61 | 153 | 32 |
| Goats - Farms reporting | 10 | 4 | 2 | 6 | 6 | 5 | 0 |
| Llamas and alpacas - Farms reporting | 7 | 4 | 0 | 2 | 6 | 7 | 1 |
| Rabbits - Farms reporting | 11 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 6 | 0 |
| Bison (buffalo) - Farms reporting | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Hens and chickens - Farms reporting | 50 | 14 | 8 | 16 | 26 | 50 | 5 |
| Turkeys - Farms reporting | 7 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 5 | 6 | 1 |

Table 2: Livestock on Farms by Electoral Area

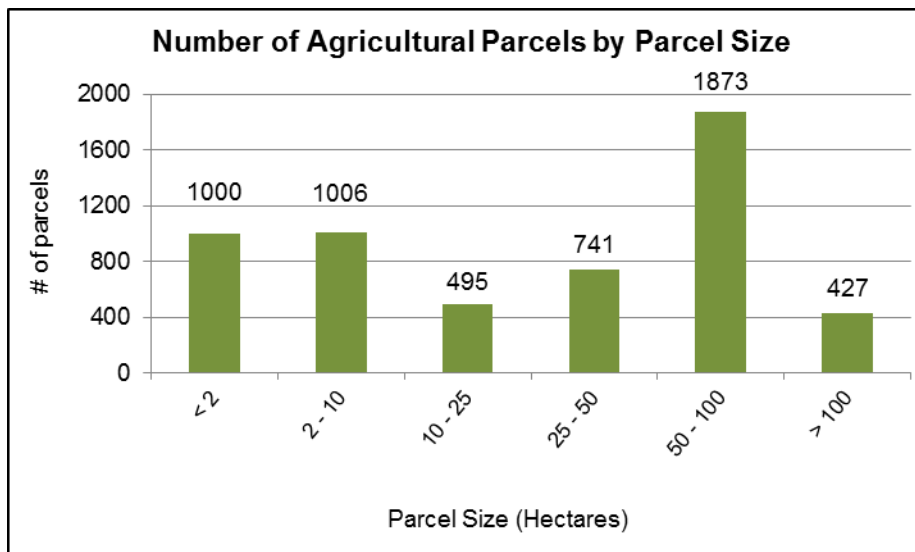


Figure 2: Number of Agricultural Parcels by Parcel Size

1.2.3 Electoral Area A

| | | |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| Municipalities | = | Town of Smithers |
| | = | District of Telkwa |
| Population | = | 5,391 persons (rural) 12,145 persons (total) |
| Rural Area | = | 370,529 hectares |
| ALR Land | = | 71,415 hectares |
| Private ALR land | = | 48,821 hectares |
| Land with farm status | = | 31,645 hectares |

Electoral Area A contains approximately 30% of the population of the RDBN. Telkwa is home to the only Class B slaughter facility in the Regional District. Agricultural activities are primarily ranching, followed by field crops and dairy cow productions. This Electoral Area also has the highest number of ALR parcels smaller than 2 hectares in the region.

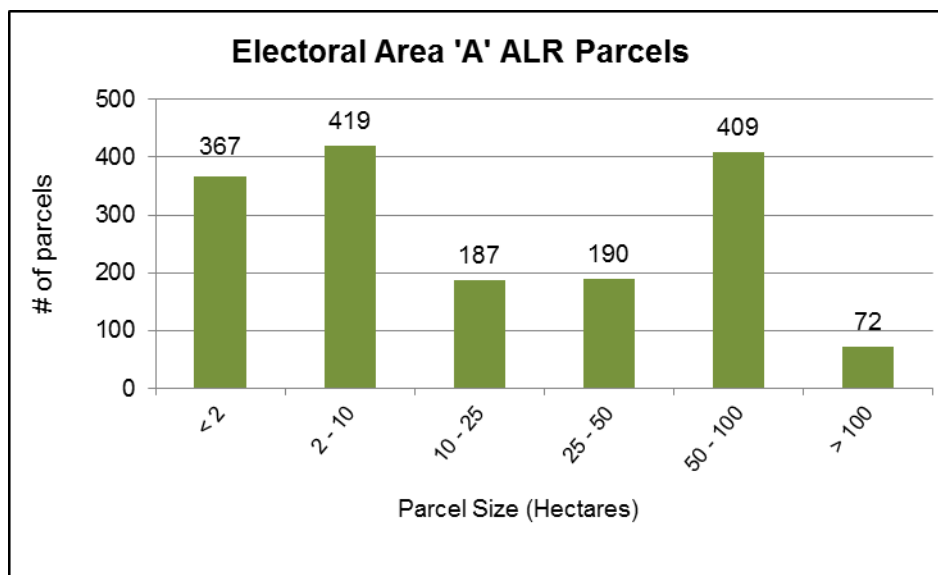


Figure 3: Electoral Area 'A' ALR Parcels

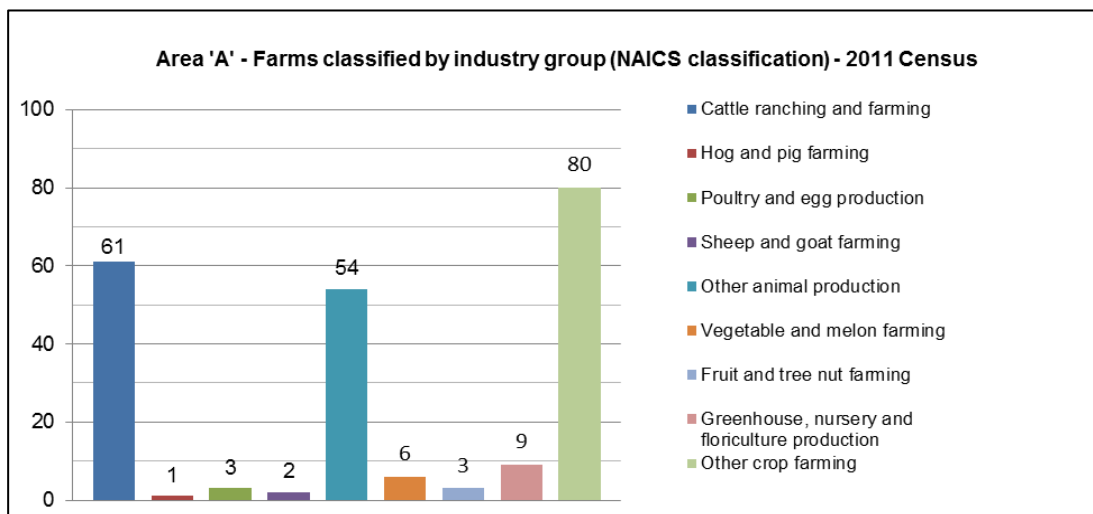


Figure 4: Area 'A' - Farms Classified by Industry Group

1.2.4 Electoral Area B

| | | |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| Municipalities | = | Village of Burns Lake |
| Population | = | 2,102 persons (rural) 4,131 persons (total) |
| Rural Area | = | 392,261 hectares |
| ALR Land | = | 8,593 hectares |
| Private ALR land | = | 8,281 hectares |
| Land with farm status | = | 4,637 hectares |

Agricultural activity in the area is primarily ranching and hay production. The productive land in the area is limited by higher elevations and a slightly harsher climate than other areas of the region.

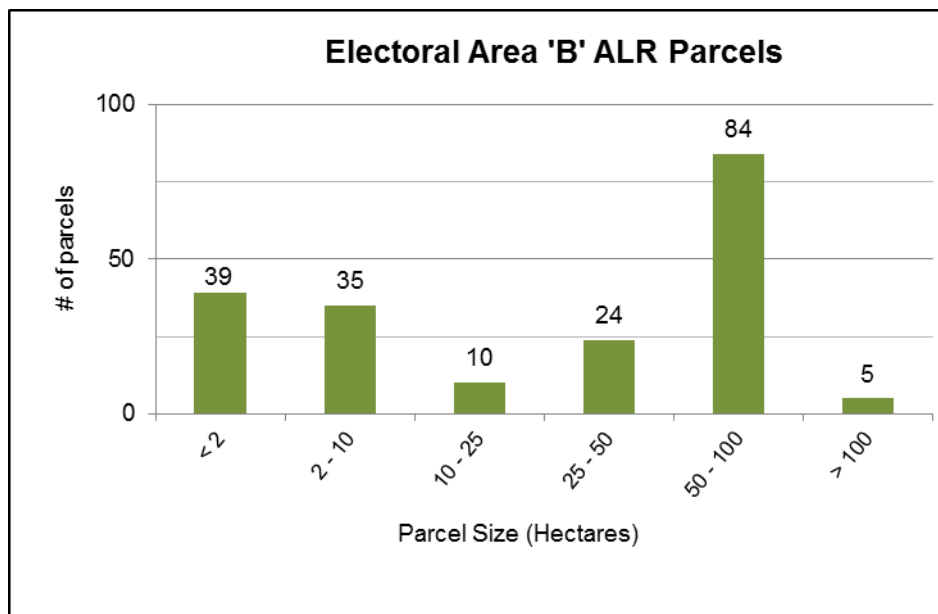


Figure 6: Electoral Area 'B' ALR Parcels

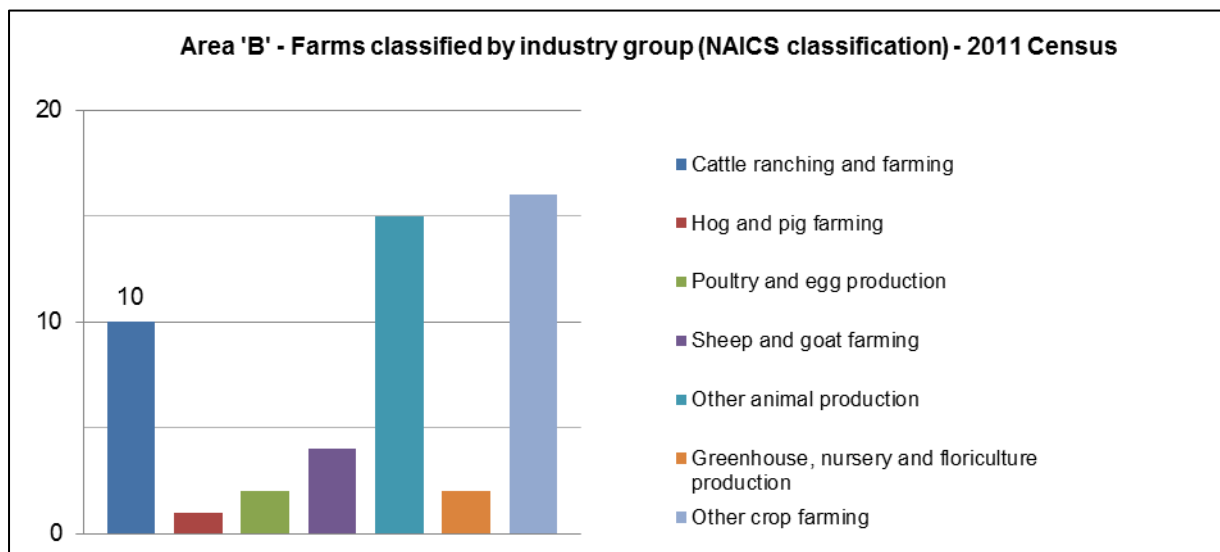


Figure 5: Area 'B' - Farms Classified by Industry Group

1.2.5 Electoral Area C

| | | |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| Municipalities | = | District of Fort St. James |
| Population | = | 1,429 persons (rural) 3,120 persons (total) |
| Rural Area | = | 2,718,351 hectares |
| ALR Land | = | 37,878 hectares |
| Private ALR land | = | 7,270 hectares |
| Land with farm status | = | 3,158 hectares |

Electoral Area C is the largest and most sparsely populated area in the Regional District. The agricultural activity in this area is predominantly ranching and hay production.

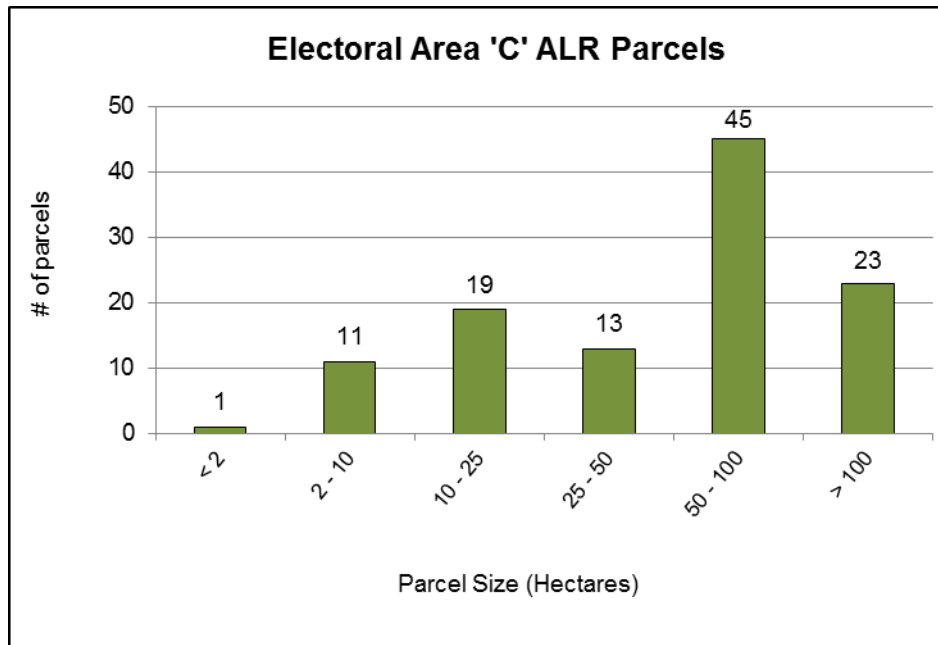


Figure 8: Electoral Area 'C' ALR Parcels

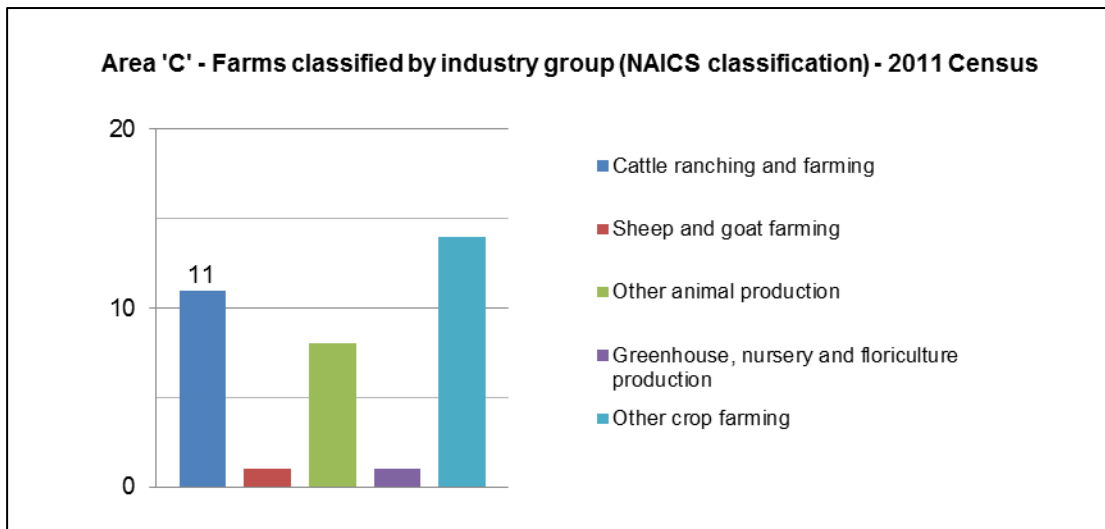


Figure 7: Area 'C' - Farms Classified by Industry Group

1.2.6 Electoral Area D

| | | |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| Municipalities | = | Village of Fraser Lake |
| Population | = | 1,734 persons (rural) 2,901 persons (total) |
| Rural Area | = | 481,200 hectares |
| ALR Land | = | 35,878 hectares |
| Private ALR land | = | 27,010 hectares |
| Land with farm status | = | 18,063 hectares |

The agricultural activity in this area is predominantly ranching, and hay production.

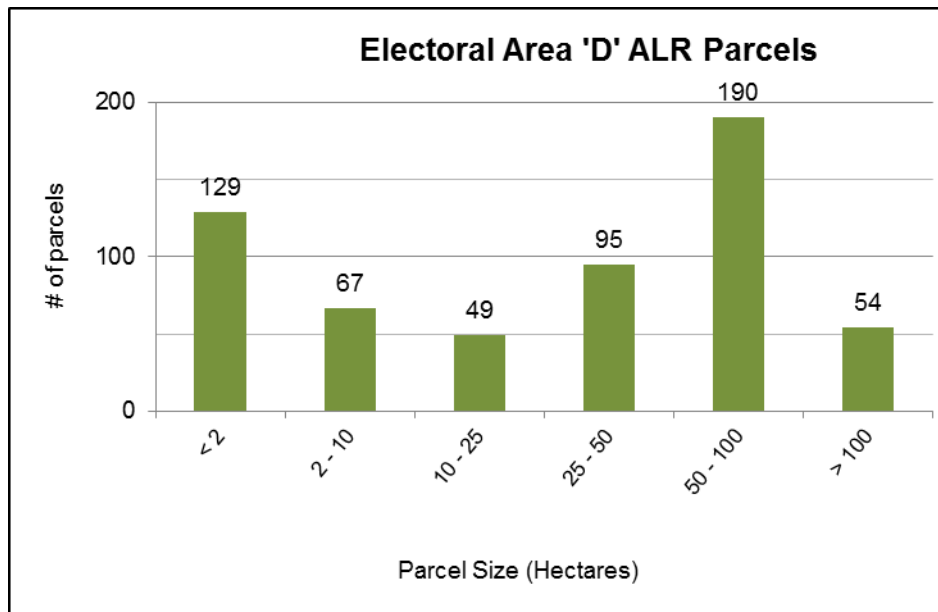


Figure 10: Electoral Area 'D' ALR Parcels

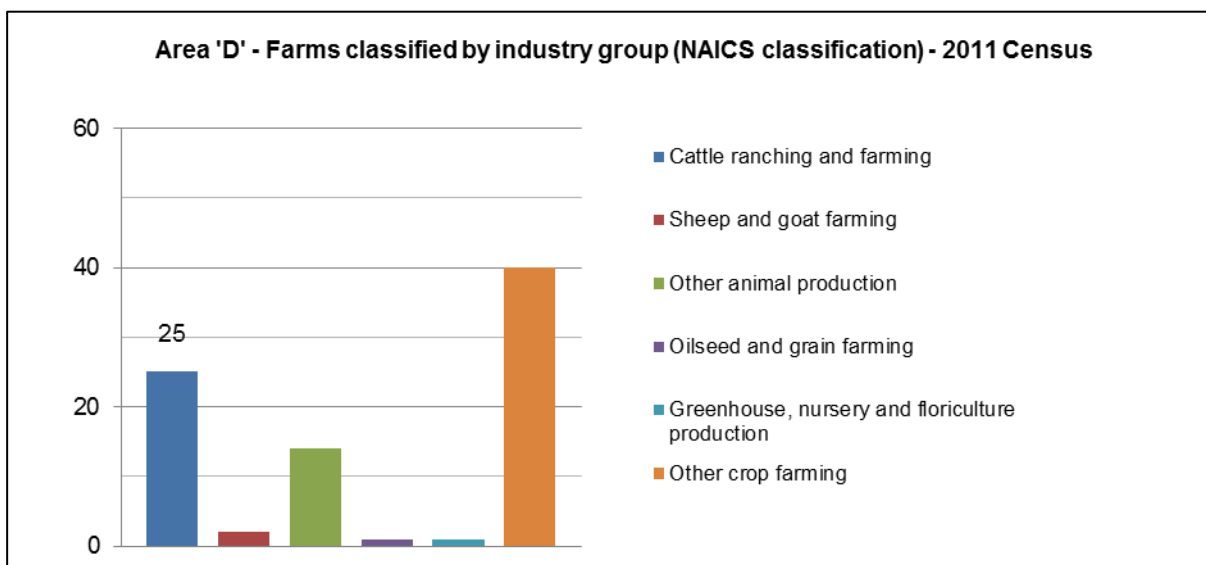


Figure 9: Electoral Area 'D' - Farms Classified by Industry Group

1.2.7 Electoral Area E

| | | |
|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|
| Population | = | 1,507 persons (rural) |
| Rural Area | = | 1,591,295 hectares |
| ALR Land | = | 58,677 hectares |
| Private ALR land | = | 32,375 hectares |
| Land with farm status | = | 20,417 hectares |

Electoral Area E has the lowest population of any area of the Regional District. The agricultural activity in this area is predominantly ranching, and hay production.

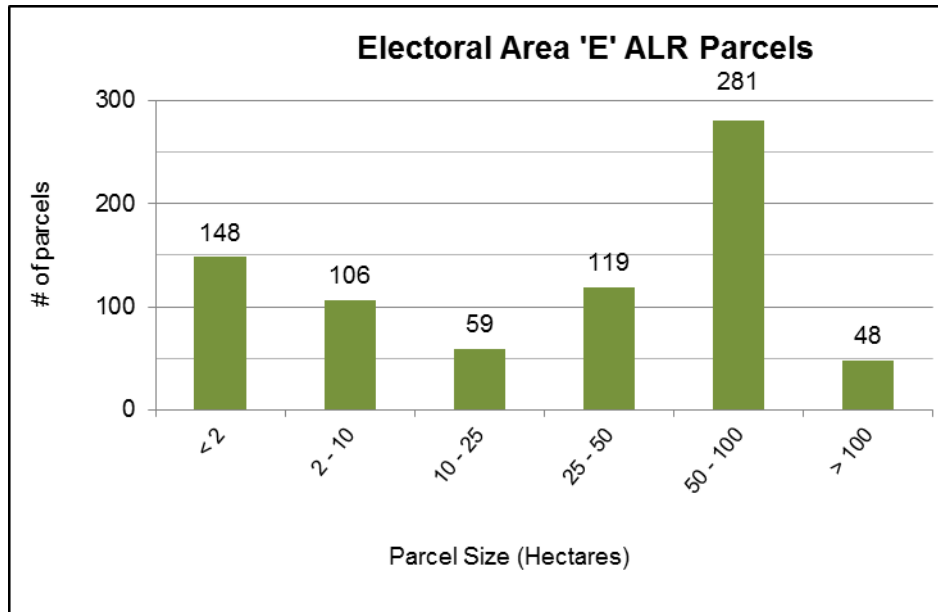


Figure 11: Electoral Area 'E' ALR Parcels

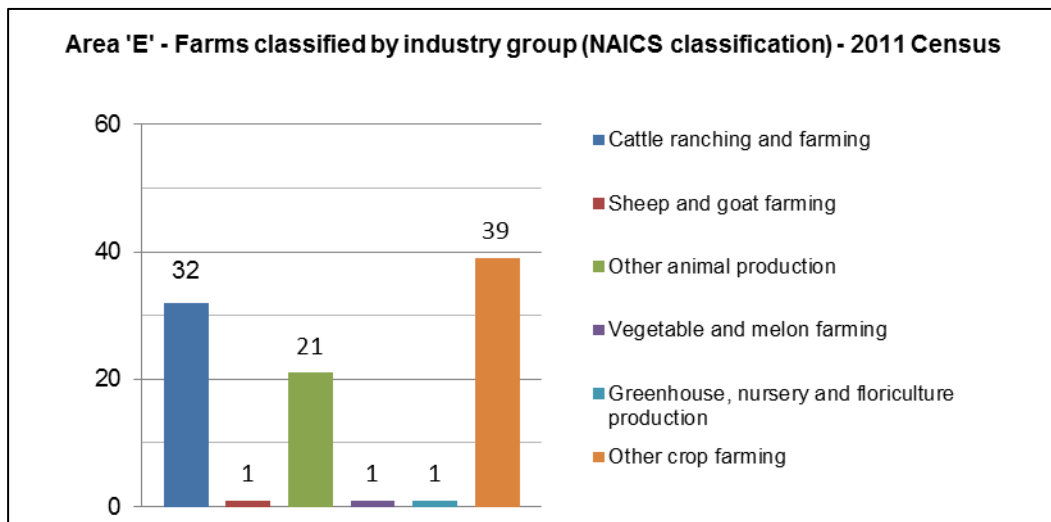


Figure 12: Area 'E' - Farms Classified by Industry Group

1.2.8 Electoral Area F

| | | |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| Municipalities | = | District of Vanderhoof |
| Population | = | 3,702 persons (rural) 8,182 persons (total) |
| Rural Area | = | 564,800 hectares |
| ALR Land | = | 126,930 hectares |
| Private ALR land | = | 93,561 hectares |
| Land with farm status | = | 63,920 hectares |

Vanderhoof and surrounding area has a deep-rooted history of agriculture; its name is of Dutch origin, meaning “of the farm”, and the town was one of the first agriculture-based settlement in the province. Ranching and hay production are the dominant agricultural activities. Area F is also home to the only Class ‘A’ slaughter and processing facility in the region.

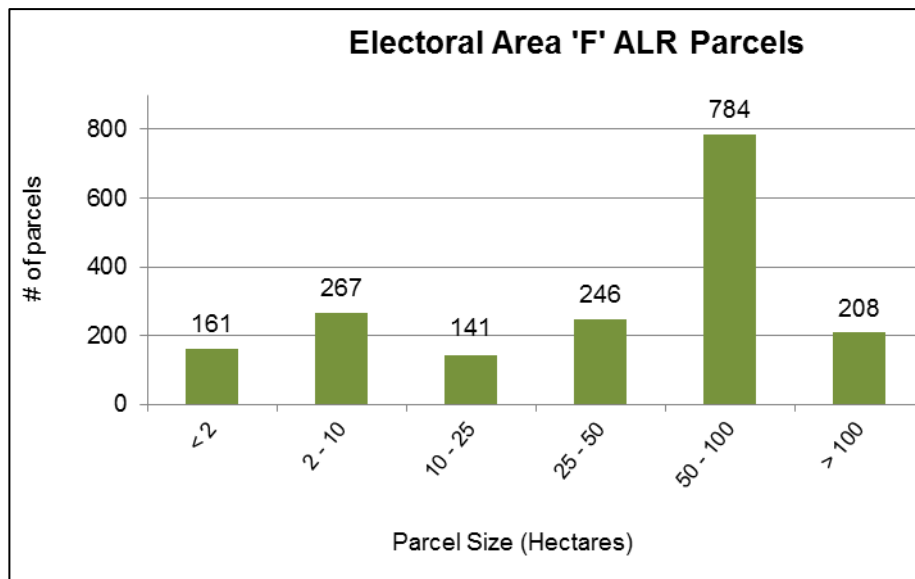


Figure 13: Electoral Area 'F' ALR Parcels

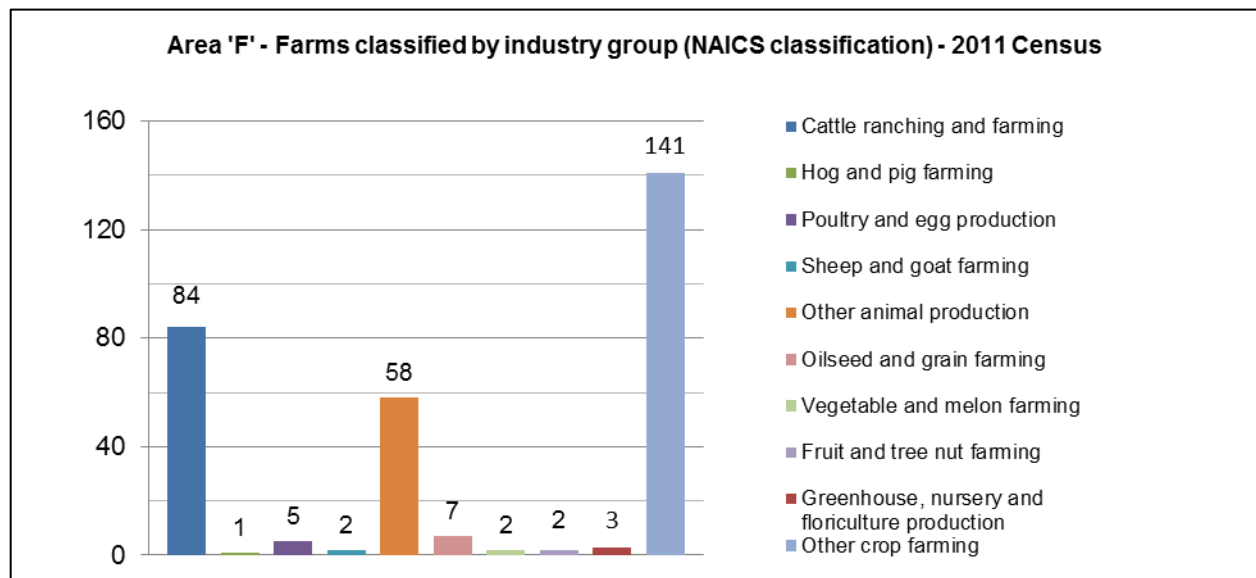


Figure 14: Area 'F' - Farms Classified by Industry Group

1.2.9 Electoral Area G

| | | | |
|-----------------------|---|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Municipalities | = | District of Houston | |
| | = | Village of Granisle | |
| Population | = | 975 persons (rural) | 4,425 persons (total) |
| Rural Area | = | 1,529,170 hectares | |
| ALR Land | = | 27,043 hectares | |
| Private ALR land | = | 11,385 hectares | |
| Land with farm status | = | 6,379 hectares | |

Ranching and hay production are the dominant agricultural activities in Electoral Area G; however, there are also limited vegetable and dairy operations.

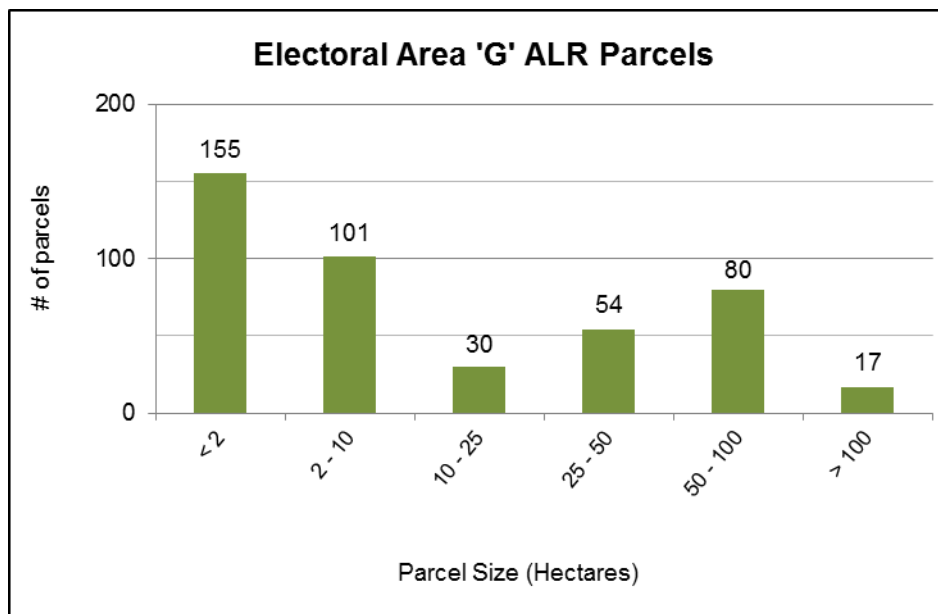


Figure 16: Electoral Area 'G' ALR Parcels

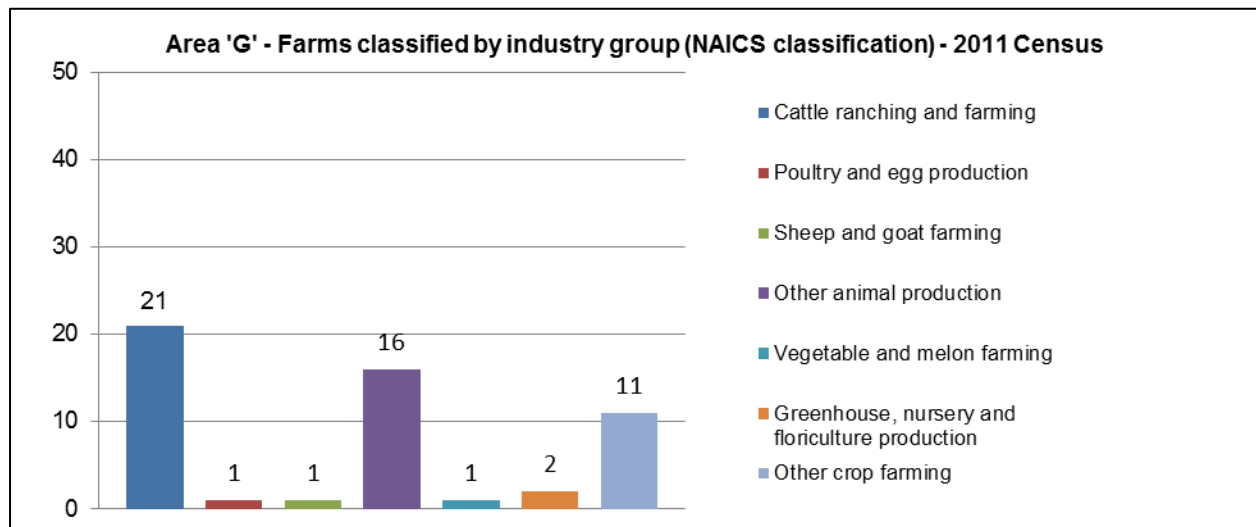


Figure 15: Area 'G' - Farms Classified by Industry Group

1.2.10 Provincially Licensed Animal Slaughter Facilities in the RDBN (2012):**Class “A” – Slaughter Plus Further Processing****Country Locker**

(Red Meat)
Dwain & Shelly Funk
6900 Teichrob Road
Box 11
Vanderhoof, BC V0J 3A0
250-567-4774
clocker@hwy16.com

Newsat Farms

(Poultry, Rabbits)
Dennis & Vicki Richardson
18706 Langston Road
Vanderhoof, BC V0J 3A1
250-567-3197 or 250-570-1488
denvic455711@yahoo.com

Class “B” – Slaughter Only**Northwest Premium Meat Co-op**

(Red Meat)
Manager: Manfred Wittwer
250-846-5168
Board Chair: Paul Davidson
250-643-2140
5986 Donaldson Road
Telkwa, BC V0J 2X0
<http://northwestpremiummeat.com>
nwpmcoop@gmail.com

Class “C” – Transitional Slaughter Establishments**Mountaineer Meats**

(Red Meat)
Gary Martin
9491 Blaney Road
Grassy Plains, BC V0J 1E0
250-694-3322

Note: See BC Ministry of Health Abattoir Profiles (<http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/protect/meat-regulation/abattoir-profiles.html>) for full details.

1.2.11 Farmers' Markets

Bulkley Valley Farmers' market (Smithers)

Open Saturdays - 8:00 am to 12:00 pm from mid-May through September

Located at the Central Park Building Parking Lot (corner of Hwy 16 and Main Street)

<http://www.bvfarmersmarket.com/>

Bulkley Valley Indoor Farmers' market (Smithers)

Open every other Saturday - 9:00 am to 12:00 pm from November 12, 2011 to April 14, 2012

Located at St. Joseph's Gym

<http://www.bvfarmersmarket.com/>

Burns Lake Farmers' market

Open Saturdays - 10:00 am to 3:00 pm from May through October

Located at the Burns Lake Heritage Centre (Chamber of Commerce)

Fort St. James Farmers' market

Open Fridays - 12:00 pm to 4:00 pm from May through September

Located at Stuart Drive near the Fort St. James Post Office

<http://www.bcfarmersmarket.org/markets/marketdetails.asp?marketID=123>

Pleasant Valley Community Market (Houston)

Open Fridays – 10:00 am to 4:00 pm from June through September

Located at Steelhead Park on Highway 16

<http://www.bcfarmersmarket.org/markets/marketdetails.asp?marketID=202>

Vanderhoof Farmers' market

Open Thursdays - 11:00 am to 3:00 pm from June through September

Located at Riverside Park in Vanderhoof

<http://www.bcfarmersmarket.org/markets/marketdetails.asp?marketID=190>

Southside Farmers' market

Open Saturday, August 11, 2012 – 10:00 am to 2:00 pm

Located at the SEDA Centre in Southbank, near the Ferry Terminal

1.3 Capacity, Soils and Agricultural Use

1.3.1 Arability and Soil Capability

ALR Soil Classification

The ALC uses the “Land Capability Classification System for Agriculture in British Columbia” to determine the agricultural capability of land. This system provides consistent guidelines for assessing agricultural capability of land. Where this mapping is not available, the Canada Land Inventory mapping is used to determine the agricultural capability of land. Both systems identify land according to its potential and limitations for agriculture using a rating system of Class 1 to 7, with several sub-categories of limitations used where necessary.

Most soils in the RDBN fall within classes 3 through 7. Class 1 land has minimal limitations when associated with the most amenable climates in the Province. In Class 2 to Class 5 lands have increased limitations. Class 6 lands have limitations that preclude arable agricultural activities yet are capable of sustaining native and/or perennial uncultivated agriculture. Class 7 lands have limitations that preclude all arable and natural grazing agricultural systems, regardless of the climate. Whether or not land is currently in agricultural production does not impede the agricultural capability of soils.

1.4 Governance Structure

1.4.1 Federal Jurisdiction

The Growing Forward Agreement

The *Growing Forward* Framework Agreement between the Federal, Provincial, and Territorial Governments is intended to lay the groundwork necessary for coordinated action over five years (2009 to 2013) to help the agricultural sector become more prosperous, competitive, and innovative. The agreement gives the details of national cost-shared initiatives, as well as complementary federal initiatives that will help to achieve the outcomes. Growing Forward provides funding for a number of innovative agriculture programs including the BC Environmental Farm Plan Program, which is administered by the BC Agricultural Research & Development Corporation (ardcorp).

The 5-year Growing Forward policy agreement expires on March 31, 2013. The Growing Forward 2 successor framework is under development and must be ready for implementation on April 1, 2013. Growing Forward 2 (2013-2018) is being designed to help the agricultural industry position itself to profit from emerging opportunities and to prepare for future challenges.

Food Safety

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) along with many federal, provincial and municipal organizations, works to improve the overall health of Canadians. The CFIA develops and delivers programs and services designed to protect Canadians from preventable food safety hazards, ensure that food safety emergencies are effectively managed, and that the public is aware of food safety.

Products and sectors regulated by the CFIA include:

- dairy products
- egg and egg products
- fish and seafood
- fresh fruits and vegetables
- honey
- labeling
- maple products
- meat and poultry products
- organic products
- non-federally registered sector
- packaging materials and non-food chemical products
- processed fruit and vegetables
- retail food

Disease control

The control of animal diseases is important for health reasons, as well as protection of Canada's international reputation for being free from certain serious diseases. The CFIA conducts inspections and has monitoring and testing programs in place to prevent and control the spread of diseases to the livestock and poultry sectors.

The CFIA carries out programs to guard against the entry of foreign animal diseases and to prevent the spread of certain domestic animal diseases.

Animal health starts on the farm with biosecurity, which are measures that prevent the introduction and spread of contagious diseases. Biosecurity measures should be in place wherever animals are present, including farms, auction markets, agricultural fairs, research laboratories and international borders. The CFIA develops national biosecurity standards, protocols and strategies for livestock, poultry and aquaculture production in collaboration with producer organizations, provincial/territorial governments, and academia.

Meat and Poultry Products

The CFIA verifies that meat and poultry products leaving federally-inspected establishments or being imported into Canada are safe. The CFIA also monitors registered and non-registered establishments for labeling compliance and audits the delivery of a grading program based on objective standards of meat quality and retail yield. Only meat from Federally Licensed slaughter facilities under the *Meat Inspection Act* may be transported or purchased across provincial borders.

CFIA activities include:

- registration and inspection of slaughter and processing establishments of meat products;
- inspection and grading of exports and meat products for interprovincial trade;
- inspection of imported meat products;
- process, formula, labeling policy and program development, registration and verification;
- verifying that food advertising complies with requirements;
- retail inspection including enforcing label regulations at retail; and
- residue testing.

The key acts and regulations that CFIA enforces are:

- *Canada Agricultural Products Act* and the associated *Livestock and Poultry Carcass Grading Regulations*
- *Food and Drugs Act* and the associated *Food and Drug Regulations*
- *Meat Inspection Act* and the associated *Meat Inspection Regulations, 1990*

There are currently no federally licensed beef abattoirs in BC. A facility in Lac La Hache is federally licensed for processing. There is one federally licensed swine slaughter facility in Langley, and several federally licensed poultry slaughter facilities in BC, none of which are in the RDBN.

Fish Habitat Protection

The Federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans has legal responsibilities under the *Fisheries Act* to protect and manage fish and fish habitat. The *Fisheries Act* provides the legal framework for regulating impacts on fish and fish habitat associated with works, undertakings, operations and activities occurring in or around fresh and marine waters throughout Canada.

There are five habitat protection provisions of the *Fisheries Act* that cover a wide range of powers, authorities and duties to regulate impacts to fish and fish habitat in relation to:

- fish passage;
- in-stream flow needs of fish;
- destruction of fish by any means other than fishing;
- harmful, alteration disruption or destruction of fish habitat; and
- [prohibition of the deposit of deleterious substances](#).

The prime focus of the Habitat Management Program's regulatory activity is Section 35 of the *Fisheries Act*. Nevertheless, all the habitat protection provisions must be considered when reviewing the negative effects of a project to fish habitat. Subsection 35(1) is a general prohibition of harmful alteration, disruption or destruction (HADD) of fish habitat. This means that any project that results in HADD is a contravention of Subsection 35(1). The only relief from this general prohibition is when a Subsection 35(2) Authorization is issued for the HADD.

Any project planned near water needs to take into account the protection of the aquatic environment. It is possible to avoid harm to fish and fish habitat and comply with the *Fisheries Act* by adhering to the Operation Statements provided on DFO's website. Operational statements are standardized planning guidance documents tailored to fit the unique ecological and legal requirements in BC. There are a number of Operational Statement activities that overlap with the BC *Water Act*, and anyone considering work in and about a stream should consult with the BC Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations, Water Stewardship Division in addition to DFO. If a project falls outside the scope of the Operational Statements, a project proposal must be submitted to DFO for review and assessment.

1.4.2 Provincial Jurisdiction

The Agricultural Land Commission

The Provincial Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) is an independent Provincial agency responsible for administering the *Agricultural Land Commission Act* and the associated *Agricultural Land Reserve Use, Subdivision, and Procedure Regulation* which establishes the Province's agricultural land use zone. The purpose of the ALC is:

- to preserve agricultural land;
- to encourage farming in collaboration with other communities of interest; and
- to encourage local governments, First Nations, the government and its agents to enable and accommodate farm use of agricultural land and uses compatible with agriculture in their plans, bylaws and policies.

The ALR applies to approximately 4.7 million hectares of private and public lands across the province. The Agricultural Land Reserve takes precedence over legislation and bylaws that may apply to land within the reserve. The ALC is responsible for the administration of the *Agricultural Land Commission Act and Regulation*; however, the ALC relies heavily on local governments for that administration, and for planning necessary to achieve the objectives of the provincial government's agriculture reserve program. The role of local government in relation to the ALR is discussed further in Section 1.4.3 of this document.

The ALR can be thought of as a provincial land use zone in which agriculture is recognized as the priority use. Farming is encouraged and non-agricultural uses are regulated. If you wish to subdivide or use your land for non-farm purposes or exclude your land from the ALR, you must submit an application to the Commission and obtain its approval.

The ALC has created regional panels to carry out the duties of the Commission and to represent the Commission in different areas of BC. The North Panel is responsible for the area covered by the RDBN. The North Panel is present in our region up to 2-3 times a year to meet with applicants on their property in order to make a more informed decision on ALR applications.

In November 2010 the Chair of the ALC, Richard Bullock, submitted a review of the Agricultural Land Commission titled: *Moving Forward: A Strategic Vision for the Agricultural Land Commission for Future Generations*. This report identifies issues and makes recommendations with respect to the ALC's operations, policy, regulations and legislation. As a result of this report, the *Agricultural Land Commission Act* was amended in 2011 in order to:

- Increase enforcement within the ALR by involving qualified officials from other government agencies and levels of government in enforcement activities.
- Place a five-year moratorium on repeat applications to the ALR and focus resources on core functions.
- Begin the transition to a more self-supporting operating model by 2013, and prepare to augment provincial funding by charging certain fees.
- Ensure greater consistency and consideration of the ALR's core values in regional panel decision-making by increasing the oversight of the chair of the ALC.

In November 2011 the province also announced an additional \$1.6 million in funding for the ALC, increased sharing of provincial resources, and a new minister's bylaw standard restricting building residential homes in the ALR.

Farm Practices Protection Act

The *Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act* is complimentary to the ALR farm land preservation program. This Act, which came into effect in 1995, gives farmers the right to farm in the ALR and on land zoned for farm use.

The Act protects farmers that are using normal farm practices from nuisance lawsuits and nuisance bylaws of local governments. The Act also establishes a process to resolve concerns and complaints in order to:

- Let farmers farm;
- Keep people out of court;
- Deal fairly with people's concerns and complaints; and
- Deal with poor farm practices.

The protection provided by the Act specifically relates to nuisances such as odour, noise, dust or other disturbances. The right to farm is, however, not automatic. It requires that:

- a farm operation use normal farm practices (as defined by the Act) or practices as may be prescribed by Cabinet regulation; and
- the operation does not contravene other legislation (*Environmental Management Act, Integrated Pest Management Act, and Health Act*) or any land use regulation.

When a farm operation follows these requirements, the farmer is not liable to any person and cannot be prevented by an injunction or court order from any nuisance related to the operation of the farm.

For farm operations conducted in the ALR or in a licensed aquaculture area that observe the points noted above, the operation is not subject to any local government bylaws related to animal control, noise or nuisance related to the farm operation.

While providing farmers with protection from unwarranted nuisance complaints, the FPPA also provides a balanced approach to resolving concerns about farm operations for people living near farms. Both informal and formal processes have been put in place to assist all parties in resolving concerns and complaints about farm operations.

Water Act

The Water Act assigns ownership of surface and ground water to the Crown. It provides for the allocation and management of surface water, while giving all property owners equal access to water on a first-come/first serve basis. The Act creates a comprehensive system for the regulation of the Province's fresh water systems. Specific legislated responsibilities include: granting and managing water licenses; entertaining objections to licenses; apportioning rights under licenses; authorizing licensees' rights with respect to compensation and expropriation; holding public inquiries; operating appropriate appeal procedures to the Environmental Appeal Board; reserving and removing bodies of water from being used under the Act and issuing certificates incorporating water users' communities.

Those wishing to irrigate agricultural land using surface water must apply for a water license through the Ministry of Environment, Water Stewardship Branch. Water licenses are registered with properties, therefore remain with the property when ownership changes.

Section 9 of the *Water Act* requires an approval for any “changes in and about a stream.” The approval must be in accordance with Part 7 of the Water Regulation or under a Later License or Order. Under the *Water Act*, “changes in an about a stream” are defined as: any modification to the nature of the stream including the land, vegetation, natural environment or flow of water within the stream, or any activity or construction within the stream channel that has or may have an impact on a stream. Applications for approval or notifications are submitted to the local FrontCounter BC office.

Environmental Management Act

The *Environmental Management Act* (EMA) was brought into force on July 8, 2004. The EMA is implemented through the Waste Discharge Regulation (WDR) that prohibits certain industries, trades, businesses, operations or activities from discharging waste. Accordingly, Schedules 1 and 2 of the WDR prescribe industries, trades, businesses, operations or activities that must obtain ministry authorization to discharge waste into the environment. Both schedules list activities that are specific to the agricultural industry. While activities that are not identified in the WDR do not require ministry authorization to discharge waste, they are still prohibited from causing pollution.

Agricultural Waste Control Regulation (B.C. Reg. 131/92)

Under the *Environmental Management Act*, the Agricultural Waste Control Regulation establishes practices for using, storing and managing agricultural waste that results in the waste being handled in an environmentally sound manner. If a producer handles agricultural waste in accordance with the regulation and its associated code of practice, a permit is not required. Agricultural waste includes manure, used mushroom medium and agricultural vegetation waste.

Assessment Act

The *Assessment Act* provides for a separate class for farm land. This class allows taxing jurisdictions to provide a special tax rate to farm land. Typically this is a low rate, which in combination with the regulated farm valuation rates used for land in farm class, provides a significant tax benefit to owners of these properties. However, in some cases taxing jurisdictions have chosen to apply a high tax rate to farm land to mitigate losses or shifts that may otherwise occur. The RDBN taxes farm land at the residential rate, with a 50% exemption for farm land and an exemption for the first \$50,000 of outbuildings. Under B.C. Regulation 411/95 (Standards for the Classification of Land as a Farm) of the *Assessment Act*, a farm is all or part of a parcel of land used for:

- primary agricultural production
- a farmer's dwelling, or
- the training and boarding of horses when operated in conjunction with horse rearing.

Under these scenarios farm land is not assessed at market value, but at its value in farm use only. All farm buildings, including the farmer's dwelling, are classified as residential. Properties that are taxed in the farm class category must meet land use and income requirements. Primary agricultural products must be sold each year. Currently minimum income requirements, which must be met at least once every two years, are calculated as follows:

- \$10,000 on land less than 8,000 m² (2 ac)
- \$2,500 on land between 8,000 m² (2 ac) and 4 ha (10 ac)
- on land larger than 4 ha (10 ac): the operator must earn \$2,500 plus five per cent of the actual value of any farm land in excess of 4 ha.

Farm status is reviewed on a regular basis, depending on how much the farm's income surpasses the threshold requirements. Reviews vary from one to seven years. Farm status is a voluntary and owner-driven classification; farmers must apply to BC Assessment to have their status changed.

Meat Inspection Regulation

B.C.'s Meat Inspection Regulation (MIR) is intended to ensure food safety, strengthen the meat processing sector, rebuild consumer and international confidence in B.C., and adopt an outcomes-based approach to regulation. However, this regulation has had a serious negative impact on small-scale producers that rely on farm gate sales. The MIR sets out the requirements for all provincially licensed slaughter facilities in British Columbia. The British Columbia Meat Inspection Regulation was enacted under the *Food Safety Act* in 2004, and compliance became mandatory on September 30, 2007.

Meat originating from provincially licensed slaughter facilities can only be sold within the province of BC. Federally licensed facilities can sell meat outside of the Province and internationally. The MIR requires that animals are humanely slaughtered, carcasses are handled hygienically and butchered in a sanitary environment, and that meat is stored and packaged in ways that minimize contamination risks.

MIR licenses allow either slaughter only (Class B), or both slaughter and cut-and wrap-services (Class A). Recent amendments to the regulation (April 2010) introduced a graduated licensing system that includes two new licenses (Class D and Class E) designed to support local livestock and meat production in B.C.'s more remote and rural communities. This region does not currently qualify for Class D and Class E licenses.

The provincial license classes are detailed as follows:

Class A (Slaughter plus further processing) and **Class B** (slaughter only) licenses are available anywhere in the province and allow the operator to offer custom kill services as well as slaughtering own animals.

Class C (slaughter only) licenses were issued to allow slaughterhouses to continue operating while completing the transition to a Class A or B license. These licenses have been be phased out and no new applications were accepted after June 1, 2010.

Class D (slaughter only) licenses are issued to small operators, and are limited to 25 animal units. Sales are restricted to the Regional District where the slaughter occurred. Class D licenses are restricted to areas designated by Health BC, and are not permitted in the RDBN.

Class E (slaughter only) licenses may be issued to small operators and are limited to 10 animal units. Sales are restricted to the Regional District where the slaughter occurs and sales are restricted to the consumer only. To obtain an E license an operator must demonstrate a lack of access to a class A, B, or C facility.

Note: One animal unit means: combined weight, when measured alive, of 1000 lbs (454 kg) of meat (e.g., beef, poultry, bison, etc.)

The BC Abattoir Inspection System Review (BCAISR)

The Canadian food Inspection Agency (CFIA) currently provides inspection services to BC abattoirs under contract. The CFIA will no longer be providing these services by 2014. The Province of BC is currently reviewing the abattoir inspection system. The province has initiated the BCAISR with a mandate to identify potential modifications, enhancements or alternatives to the existing meat inspection system in provincially licensed Class A and B facilities. The BCAISR has recommended two options for a new meat inspection system for Class A and B abattoirs. Public input on the two options is currently being considered.

1. Enhanced Traditional Meat Inspection System: As in the current system, the ongoing presence of a trained government meat inspector is required for the facilities to slaughter. Inspectors oversee the critical stages in the slaughter process. They examine each animal or flock before slaughter, examine each carcass after slaughter, and have the authority to remove animals from the food chain by condemnations. Inspectors stamp all carcasses that pass inspection, or delegate this role.

2. Preventative Partnership Meat Inspection System: In this system, government provides oversight of slaughter facilities through regular inspections with trained government meat inspectors. The frequency of inspection in each facility varies according to an 'inspection profile' based on the complexity of a facility's operation. For some facilities this may mean that an inspector is present every slaughter day, for others not. Abattoir employees are trained and certified to examine livestock and carcasses in order to determine if these are fit for human consumption. These employees are responsible for removing animals from the food chain if necessary. A trained meat inspector and a veterinarian are available by phone and Internet seven days a week to support abattoirs that are operational without an inspector present.

Land Title Act

The agriculture sector relies on access to Crown land, especially in the case of rangeland. Ninety-four percent of the land base in BC is managed by the provincial government.

In addition to the protections provided by the *Farm Practices Protection Act*, the *Land Title Act* enables an Approving Officer to require that a subdivision does not unreasonably interfere with adjacent farming operations due to inadequate buffering or separation and provides for the elimination of unnecessary road endings. All subdivisions and boundary adjustments within the RDBN are at the discretion of an Approving Officer.

Approving Officers are supported in their efforts to contribute to compatibility along the urban/agricultural boundary by staff of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Agricultural Land Commission. In addition several guides and booklets have been developed to assist Approving Officers in their decisions. These include:

- [Factsheet - Important Information for Local Government Subdivision Approving Officers](#) 1996;
- [Subdivision Near Agriculture - A Guide for Approving Officers](#) 1996;
- [Planning Subdivisions Near Agriculture](#) 1996;
- [Landscaped Buffer Specifications](#) 1993; and
- [Guide for Bylaw Development in Farming Areas](#), 2011.

Northern Health Authority

The Northern Health Authority regulations relate to agriculture in a number of ways, including public health protection, food security, and regulation of temporary markets and community food events.

Public Health Protection

Northern Health Public Health Protection is responsible for developing and implementing legislation, policies and programs in the area of environmental health. In particular, Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) inspect and monitor activities and premises that may affect the public's health. They also administer and enforce provincial legislation related to environmental health, and provide interventions to minimize health and safety hazards. Relating to food and agriculture, applicable legislation may include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Public Health Act
 - Food Premises Regulation
 - Health Hazards Regulation
 - Sewerage System Regulation

- Drinking Water Protection Act and Regulation
- Food Safety Act
- Meat Inspection Regulation

Regarding food premises (restaurants, food stores, food mobiles), Northern Health administers the Food Premises Regulation under the *Public Health Act* in the RDBN. The Food Premises Regulation outlines public health requirements for businesses that supply and serve food to the public. Northern Health is responsible for permitting, inspecting and responding to complaints regarding food facilities within the region.

Food Security (Good Agricultural Practices Workshops)

As Northern Health continues to support local Food Security, part of the movement is facilitating a process that supports and encourages local producers to supply food establishments and stores with locally grown whole fruits and vegetables. Northern Health is currently working with local producers and food premise operators to develop a process that would support this initiative, which will ultimately serve to address and implement food safety practices at the farm level. This pilot project is open to small-scale producers of whole fruits and vegetables that wish to distribute their product within a defined physical boundary, and within the geographical boundaries of the Northern Health HSDA. The process is not intended to replace existing “On Farm Food Safety” programs which provide a certification system for the safe production, storage and packing of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Temporary Markets and MarketSafe

MarketSafe is a food safety training program delivered by EHOs for farmers and producers who make, bake or grow products to sell at farmers' markets or other types of temporary markets. It was developed by the BC FOODSAFE Secretariat in partnership with the BC Association of Farmers' Markets. To assist in ensuring food safety practices are being followed, the BC Centre of Disease Control has developed the “Guideline for the Sale of Foods at Temporary Markets”. This guideline provides recommendations for the preparation and display of food intended for sale at temporary food markets, and identifies that:

- Vendors of higher risk foods must contact their local Health Authority and submit an application before commencement of sales.
- Vendors of lower risk foods are not required to submit an application before commencement of sales. It is the vendor's and the market manager's responsibility to ensure that all lower risk foods meet the definition of a lower risk food.
- Public health is protected by ensuring that food prepared at home which is offered for sale at temporary food markets is limited to lower risk foods.

Community Food Events

For community food events, applicants will require a free temporary food service permit from Northern Health for the short-term preparation and/serving of food products. Public Health Protection staff regulates the provision of food at community events that are advertised or open

to the general public. Permits are not required for food served at functions that are for the members and guests of a private organization or group.

BC Centre for Disease Control

The BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) plays an important role in the regulation of food products, for the purpose of keeping food nutritious and wholesome. The role of the BCCDC includes:

- Inspection and licencing of provincial dairies
- Inspection and licencing of provincial slaughterhouses
- Providing food guidelines, food safety training, travel advice, and food safety information for fish, dairy, meat and fruits and vegetables.
- Providing laboratory testing services to Public Health Inspectors in the Health Authorities to check on the sanitary quality of food
- Providing information to the public, industry and partnering with other agencies, for example, FOODSAFE, CPCSFE (FightBac!) and EatSmart BC

BCCDC Environmental Health division provides policy and scientific advice to the local Health Authorities and public. This is accomplished in part by developing guidelines and food safety information that are used as a basis for programs administered by the Health Authorities.

1.4.3 Local Government

Official Community Plans

An Official Community Plan (OCP) is defined in the *Local Government Act* as “a general statement of the broad objectives and policies of the local government respecting the form and character of existing and proposed land use and servicing requirements in the area covered by the plan”. An OCP is intended to be the community’s vision for the future development and growth of an area. The Regional District Board, staff, and others use the OCP to guide their land use and development decisions. An OCP also provides the public and developers with information on how their community may develop. Statements with respect to agriculture within an OCP may include the maintenance and enhancement of farming on land within a farming area or in an area designated for agricultural use. Generally speaking, OCPs support the goals of the Agricultural Land Commission, and strive to protect lands within the Agricultural Land Reserve from incompatible development and uses.

Currently, the RDBN has seven different OCPs which cover most of the privately owned land within the RDBN. Each OCP contains strong statements that support local agriculture. The following sections from the recently adopted Vanderhoof Rural OCP (Bylaw No. 1517, 2009), are typical of wording in all recently adopted OCPs regarding agriculture.

2.2 General Plan Goals

2.2.3 *Protection and preservation of farm land and soil having agricultural capability, and the appropriate utilization of that land for agricultural purposes.*

3.1 Agriculture (AG) Designation

The Agriculture (AG) designation applies to those areas that are most suitable to agricultural activities. It is the intent of this designation to preserve these lands for the purposes of farming and other related activities. In general the Agriculture (AG) designation follows the boundaries of the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR).

3.1.1 Objectives

- (1) To protect and preserve farm land and soil having agricultural capability.*
- (2) To encourage the expansion and full utilization of land for agricultural purposes.*
- (3) To support the objectives of the Provincial Agricultural Land Commission.*
- (4) To encourage a diversity of agricultural uses and opportunities.*

3.1.2 Policies

- (1) Agriculture, grazing, and other compatible uses of land provided within the Agricultural Land Commission Act will be permitted.*
- (2) Silviculture practices and aggregate extraction that allow the restoration of land for agriculture are supported within the Agricultural (AG) designation.*
- (3) A minimum parcel size of 16 hectares (39.5 acres) is supported unless a different parcel size is approved by the Agricultural Land Commission.*
- (4) New roads and utility and communication corridors required in the Plan area should minimize the negative impact on existing and potential agricultural operations.*
- (5) Wherever possible contiguous areas of agricultural land will be preserved to ensure that agriculture and associated activities remain economically viable and environmentally sound.*
- (6) Severances for small lot residential (other than home site severances approved by the Agricultural Land Commission), institutional, commercial or industrial development shall be avoided. However, applications for exclusions, subdivisions, and non-farm uses within the Agricultural Land Reserve may be supported if:
 - (a) There is limited agricultural potential within the proposed area;*
 - (b) Soil conditions are not suitable for agriculture;*
 - (c) Neighbouring uses will not be compromised;*
 - (d) Adequate provisions for fencing are provided, where necessary;**

- (e) *There is a demonstrated need for the proposed development; and,*
- (f) *The application is in the best interest of the community.*
- (7) *The inclusion of land in the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) is supported provided the reason for inclusion is based solely on the arability of that land.*
- (8) *The voluntary consolidation of legal parcels which form part of the same farm unit will be encouraged. Subdivisions and consolidations which permit more efficient use of land for agricultural purposes will also be supported.*
- (9) *The Regional District supports the implementation and enforcement of the Farm Practices Protection Act, the Code of Agricultural Practice for Waste Management and applicable environmental guidelines for agricultural producers.*
- (10) *Home based businesses, including bed and breakfasts, operated in accordance with the requirements of the Agricultural Land Reserve are supported.*
- (11) *The Province is encouraged to implement innovative approaches to making appropriately located Crown lands available and affordable for agricultural use.*
- (12) *The Regional District encourages the Agricultural Land Commission to take steps to prohibit the use of productive agricultural land for the planting of trees for purposes of creating a carbon sink or carbon offset.*
- (13) *The planting of trees on non-arable land within the Agricultural Designation is encouraged.*
- (14) *The Province is encouraged to support local agricultural operations to ensure their long-term viability.*
- (15) *The conversion of small parcels created to accommodate institutional uses such as churches and community halls to residential development shall be discouraged.”*

The agriculture objectives apply to lands designated as Agricultural within the OCP. Generally, the Agricultural designation applies to lands within the ALR or lands that have been identified as having good agricultural potential through an arability study. Electoral Area ‘E’ (Francois/Ootsa) is currently the only electoral area within the RDBN that does not have an OCP.

Local Government and the ALR

The *Agricultural Land Commission Act* mandates the Commission to work with local governments to accommodate, support and encourage farming on ALR lands. The Act also requires local governments to ensure its bylaws, such as OCPs and zoning bylaws etc., are consistent with the Act.

Local governments have the ability to stop applications from proceeding to the ALC in certain instances where a proposal is contrary to local land use planning. The *Agricultural Land Commission Act* provides that if an application applies to land that is zoned for agricultural or farm use or requires an amendment to a plan or bylaw, the application may not proceed unless it is authorized by the local government.

When the original *Land Commission Act* was passed in 1973, the ALC obtained significant powers that exceed most other Provincial Ministries relating to the control of land use. However, local government planning and zoning powers remain. As a result, both the ALC and local governments have legitimate regulatory authority over land in the ALR. However, zoning can only add further restrictions to the ALR Regulations, provided the zoning does not restrict agriculture.

The ALC supports local governments in their planning processes involving ALR lands by providing:

- Information on the location of ALR boundaries
- History of Commission decisions and information on relevant studies including past reviews of ALR boundaries
- Experience drawn from working in similar processes in other areas
- Review of ALR boundaries if warranted in the ALC's opinion
- Staff resources
- Publications that provide guidance on achieving consistency between plans, bylaws and the reserves.

The *Agricultural Land Commission Act* also provides for the ALC to delegate decision making relating to subdivision and non-farm use to local governments. Some local governments have entered into memorandums of understanding and agreements with the ALC to improve the coordination and integration of interdependent programs. The delegation provision is limited to areas identified within an OCP that is approved by the ALC. Should a local government and the ALC disagree over a community issue relative to agricultural land, the *Agricultural Land Commission Act* provides for a dispute resolution process. This has not occurred in most jurisdictions including the RDBN.

ALR Applications

The RDBN processes 6 types of applications on behalf of the ALR. These are:

- Application for Subdivision
- Non-farm Use Applications
- Second Dwelling Applications
- Homesite Severance Applications
- Exclusion applications
- Inclusion applications.

Applications for subdivision, non-farm use, a second dwelling, and exclusion involve a two-stage process that begins with the RDBN. The RDBN receives the application from the property

owner, refers the application to applicable agencies for comment, and prepares a staff report to the RDBN Board. The Board takes a position on the application, which is then forwarded to the ALC for consideration. The ALC staff complete their own review of the application and make the final decision on the application.

The time required to process an ALR application varies depending on the scale of the proposed development and the number of issues that need to be addressed. The process can take a minimum of four months from the time the Regional District receives and application to the time the ALC makes a decision on the application. However, this time frame has increase notably in recent years apparently as the result of reduced ALC budgets.

Exclusion applications require the applicant to provide notice to the public before filing the application with the RDBN. The application must be advertised in the newspaper, delivered to all adjacent property owners, and posted on a sign on the property. The notices must be completed in a specific form and time frame as prescribed by the ALC. The rest of the application process for exclusion is the same as it is for subdivision or non-farm use. For exclusion applications the ALC always holds a meeting to allow the applicants an opportunity to present their proposal.

The majority of inclusion applications are submitted as a condition of an agricultural Crown grant. The RDBN Board has a policy to support inclusion applications that are a condition of a Crown grant.

Existing RDBN Zoning Bylaw Regulations

The RDBN zoning bylaw is titled “Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako Zoning Bylaw No. 700, 1993.” In this bylaw land within the RDBN is assigned a specific zoning designation which specifies the permitted uses on the land; the density of those uses; and the number, size, and siting of buildings and structures on the land. Zoning also includes regulations regarding subdivision and parking requirements.

Most land within the ALR, and other lands with identified agricultural potential, are zoned Agriculture (Ag1). The Ag1 zone is currently written as follows.

SECTION 14 - AGRICULTURAL ZONE (Ag 1)

14.01 Permitted Uses

In the Agricultural Zone the following uses of land, buildings or structures, and no other uses, are permitted:

- (a) agriculture;*
- (b) intensive agriculture;*
- (c) horticulture, nursery, greenhouse;*
- (d) single family dwelling;*

- (e) *two family dwelling on parcels not within the Agricultural Land Reserve;*
- (f) *logging and silviculture;*
- (g) *portable sawmill and lumber kiln (provided that the floor of the lumber kiln does not exceed 45 m²);*
- (h) *mineral, placer, coal and aggregate exploration, extraction and processing;*
- (i) *waste disposal site;*
- (j) *kennel and veterinary clinic;*
- (k) *outdoor recreation facilities;*
- (l) *primitive campsite;*
- (m) *guest ranch;*
- (n) *rural retreat;*
- (o) *peat extraction;*
- (p) *unpaved airstrips and helipads for use of aircraft flying non-scheduled flights;*
- (q) *home occupation;*
- (r) *buildings and structures accessory to the permitted principal uses.*

14.02 Parcel Area

The minimum parcel area required in the Agricultural Zone is 16 hectares (39.5 acres).

14.03 Density

In the Agricultural Zone not more than one single family dwelling shall be located on a parcel unless:

- (i) *Additional dwellings are permitted pursuant to the Agricultural Land Commission Act; or*
- (ii) *Additional dwellings are required for bona fide farm use on parcels not within the Agricultural Land Reserve.*

14.04 Setback

- (1) *In the Agricultural Zone no building or structure or part thereof, except a fence shall be located within 7.5 metres (24.61 ft.) of any parcel line.*
- (2) *In the Agricultural Zone no building or structure or portion thereof used for intensive agriculture shall be located within:*
 - (i) *60 metres (196.9 ft.) of a parcel line;*
 - (ii) *30 metres (98.4 ft.) of a domestic well, spring or the natural boundary of a lake or watercourse.*

14.05 Buffer Area

- (1) *Buffer areas are required for all uses in the Agricultural Zone permitted by clauses (g), (h) and (i) of Section 14.01. Such buffer areas shall comply with the provisions of Section 4.08 of this bylaw.*
- (2) *The depth of buffer required in the case of uses permitted by clause (g) and (h) of Section 14.01 shall be 30 metres (100 ft.).*
- (3) *The depth of buffer required in the case of uses permitted by clause (i) of Section 14.01 shall be 50 metres (164 ft.).*

14.06 Parking

Off-street parking space shall be provided in accordance with provisions of Section 27 of this bylaw.

Also, many other zones permit “Agriculture”, ‘Intensive Agriculture’, and “Farmers’ markets” as permitted uses.

The Zoning Bylaw’s definitions of “Agriculture” and “Intensive Agriculture” have been recently amended to the following.

AGRICULTURE means the use of land, Buildings and Structures for one or more of the following: growing, cultivating, harvesting and storage of plants and crops in fields; nurseries and greenhouses; the rearing of Livestock and Poultry; the selling of plants and crops harvested and livestock and Poultry reared on the same **PARCEL**; the slaughter of up to ten Animal Units annually, where the Livestock or Poultry slaughtered are reared on the same parcel. This use does not include **INTENSIVE AGRICULTURE**.

AGRICULTURE, INTENSIVE means the use of land, Buildings and Structures for one or more of the following: the auction of agricultural products; a feedlot; the growing of mushrooms; the slaughter of up to ten Animal Units annually.

ANIMAL UNIT means a combined animal weight, when measured alive, of 455 kg (1000 lbs.).

These definitions were recently amended to make the definition of Agriculture more inclusive, and to allow Class E (Direct Sales) Licenses under the Province’s new Meat Inspection Regulation on lands where Agriculture is a permitted use, and to allow the operation of mobile slaughter facility on lands where Intensive Agriculture is a permitted use.

While zoning applies to most settled areas within the RDBN, it should be noted that in Electoral Area E (Francois/Ootsa) zoning designations have not been applied to areas of land that are within the ALR. Traditionally residents of this area have felt that ALR regulations provide sufficient protection of agricultural land. However, if the ALR approves a non-farm use or

subdivision application in these areas, the RDBN is unable to ensure the proposal is compatible or appropriate in that location from a land-use perspective.

Proposed New RDBN Zoning Bylaw Regulations

The Planning Department is currently undertaking a comprehensive rewrite of the zoning bylaw to ensure that it meets the future needs of the region. This review has included significant attention to the impacts of the zoning bylaw regulations on agriculture. Based upon staff's review to date the following changes are proposed in relation to agriculture.

- Presently the zoning bylaw only allows limited forms of agriculture in the Country Residential (R5) and Rural Residential (R6) zones. These zones have smaller parcel sizes. Agriculture has been added to these zones as a permitted use with the effect that livestock may be kept on these smaller lots.
- The following section has been added to regulate the number of livestock and poultry permitted on small parcels where Agriculture is a permitted use. This section also allows up to 10 chickens on any parcel.

Livestock and Poultry

- (1) *Livestock are not permitted on a Parcel unless Agriculture is a permitted Use according to the Zone applicable to that Parcel.*
- (2) *Roosters are not permitted on a Parcel unless Agriculture is a permitted Use according to the Zone applicable to that Parcel.*
- (3) *A maximum of 10 chickens are permitted on a Parcel if Agriculture is not a permitted Use according to the Zone applicable to that Parcel,*
- (4) *Where Agriculture is a permitted use according to the Zone applicable to that Parcel the maximum number of Livestock that may be bred, trained, ridden, kept, reared or boarded on that Parcel is:*
 - a) *0 (zero) on Parcels that are less than 0.5 ha (1.2 acres) in area;*
 - b) *2 on Parcels that are 0.5 ha (1.2 acres) or greater in area, plus an additional 2 for every additional 0.5 ha (1.2 acre) of land (for example a 1 ha parcel may contain 4 head of Livestock and a 2 ha parcel may contain 8 head of Livestock.;*
 - d) *no limitations on Parcels that are 5.0 ha (12 acres) or greater in area.*
- (5) *Where Agriculture is a permitted use according to the Zone applicable to that Parcel the maximum number of Poultry permitted on that Parcel is:*

- a) 10 (ten) on Parcels less than 2,000 square metres (0.49 acres);
 - b) 25 on Parcels that are 2,000 square metres (0.49 acres) or greater, but less than 1.0 ha (2.47 acres);
 - c) 100 on Parcels that are 1.0 ha (2.47 acres) or greater, but less than 2.0 ha (4.94 acres),
 - d) no limitations on Parcels of 2.0 ha (4.94 acres) or greater.
- (6) Section 14.0.13 does not apply to land that is within the Agricultural Land Reserve.
- The number of zones in which a farmers' market is permitted is proposed to be increased. Currently a Farmers' market is permitted only in the Community Development and Public Use Zone (P4). It is proposed that the use be expanded to the Agricultural Zone (Ag1), the Rural Resource Zone (RR1), the General Commercial Zone (C1), and the Agricultural Industry Zone (M3).
 - Agricultural Feed Store, and Agriculture are proposed to be added as permitted uses in the Agricultural Industry (M3) zone. The restriction on storage of pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers is removed from the M3 zone as this is regulated in the Flood Control Bylaw.
 - The following is the proposed new Ag1 zone:

SECTION 17.0 - AGRICULTURAL ZONE (Ag1)

17.0.1 Permitted Uses

- (1) *Principal Uses*
 - (a) *Agriculture*
 - (b) *Intensive Agriculture*
 - (c) *Single Family Dwelling*
 - (d) *Two Family Dwelling*
 - (e) *Portable Sawmill*
 - (f) *Aggregate Processing*
 - (g) *Kennel*
 - (h) *Veterinary Clinic*
 - (i) *Outdoor Recreation*
 - (j) *Primitive Campground*
 - (k) *Guest Ranch*
 - (l) *Rural Retreat*
 - (m) *Farmers' Market*

17.0.2 Parcel Area

- (1) *The minimum Parcel area that may be created by subdivision is 16 hectares (39.5 acres).*

17.0.3 Limitations on Use

- (1) *Not more than two Single Family Dwellings or one Two Family Dwelling shall be located on a Parcel.*

17.0.4 Setback

- (1) *No Building or Structure or part thereof, shall be located within 7.5 metres (24.61 ft) of any Parcel Line.*
- (2) *No Building or Structure or portion thereof used for Intensive Agriculture shall be located within:*
 - (a) *60 metres (196.9 ft) of a Parcel line;*
 - (b) *30 metres (98.4 ft) of a domestic well, spring or the Natural Boundary of a lake or Watercourse.*
- (3) *No Building, Structure or equipment, or portion thereof used for Aggregate Processing or a Portable Sawmill shall be located within 30 metres (196.9 ft) of a Parcel Line.*
- (4) *An Aggregate Processing operation and a Portable Sawmill must be located at least 300 m from an existing residential dwelling on an adjacent or nearby property.*

17.0.5 Screening

- (1) *An Aggregate Processing operation or a Portable Sawmill shall be enclosed by a Landscape Screen not less than 2 metres (6.56 ft) high.*

Restrictions on RDBN Zoning Powers

Under the *Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act* farmers have a right to farm in farming areas provided they use “normal farm practices” and follow other legislation. See Section 1.4.2 for a discussion of the *Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act*.

Section 903 of the *Local Government Act* prohibits the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako from exercising its zoning powers to prohibit or restrict the use of land for a farm business in a farming area unless approval is given by the Minister of Agriculture.

Section 915 of the *Local Government Act* provides that intensive agriculture (the confinement of poultry, livestock or fur bearing animals, or the growing of mushrooms) is permitted in the ALR despite any zoning bylaw.

The *Agricultural Land Reserve Use, Subdivision, and Procedure Regulation* designates a number of activities as farm use. If land is in the ALR these uses may be regulated by bylaw

but must not be prohibited except through the use of a bylaw under Section 917 of the *Local Government Act*.

Farm Bylaws

Section 917 of the *Local Government Act* allows a local government to make bylaws in relation to farming areas:

- respecting the conduct of farm operations as part of a farm business,
- respecting types of buildings, structures, facilities, machinery and equipment that are prerequisite to conducting farm operations specified by the local government and that must be utilized by farmers conducting the specified farm operations,
- respecting the siting of stored materials, waste facilities and stationary equipment, and
- prohibiting specified farm operations.

A farm bylaw may only be adopted with the approval of the Minister unless the Minister has defined circumstances for which approval is not required. The RDBN does not have a Farm Bylaw.

Agricultural Development Permit Areas

An Agricultural Development Permit Area (ADPA) is a development regulation which establishes guidelines and requirements regarding the development of land in order to preserve and protect the agricultural values that exist in a specified area. Any proposed building or subdivision within an ADPA must be approved through the issuance of a permit by the local government. The authority for local governments to establish DPAs is set out in Sections 919.1 and 920 of the *Local Government Act*.

Development permits areas are one of the strongest tools for shaping new development to ensure that it respects adjacent farm land and farming practices. DPAs allow local governments to create site-specific requirements for development over and above the basic use and development regulations contained in a zoning bylaw. ADPAs are commonly used in areas where development is occurring in close proximity to agricultural land, where conflicts are likely to occur. Typical ADPAs strive to do the following:

- Protect farmland from impacts associated with urban development
- Reduce conflicts between farm operations and urban land uses.
- Define a stable and clearly-understood boundary between urban areas and the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR).
- Encourage urban development/redevelopment along the urban-ALR interface that supports the viability of agriculture.

ADPAs must describe the special site conditions or objectives that justify the designation, and specify guidelines to achieve those objectives. When an owner applies to the local government for a development permit to alter a site within a DPA, the development plans for the land must conform to the guidelines established. ADPA guidelines typically include requirements relating to

screening, setbacks, or fencing that buffer or separate development from farming activity. The RDBN has not designated any ADPAs.

Landfills and Waste

Under the *Environmental Management Act*, regional districts must prepare comprehensive plans for managing solid wastes and may be required to prepare plans to manage liquid wastes.

The RDBN Regional Solid Waste Management Plan outlines procedures for the disposal of all residential, commercial and industrial solid waste within the RDBN, pursuant to the *Environmental Management Act*. The Plan has developed a number of policies and objectives which provide the overall direction for solid waste management in the region. The RDBN operates two solid-waste landfills, and seven transfer stations throughout the region.

The RDBN encourages backyard composting, however does not currently have in place policies or procedures for composting of agricultural waste. The disposal of carcasses is addressed in two separate RDBN policies. The RDBN's Cattle Carcass Disposal Policy outlines procedures for the disposal of Specified Risk Material (SRM) waste pursuant to CFIA regulations. The RDBN's Animal Carcass Disposal General Policy outlines procedures for the disposal of all other animal carcasses.

All other waste generated from agricultural activities must be disposed of in accordance with the *Environmental Management Act* and the RDBN's Solid Waste Management Plan policies.

1.5 Survey Results

As part of the Agriculture Plan process, the RDBN sought the feedback of the public through the use of a survey. Surveys were made available both on the Regional District website and in print versions. Electronic responses of the survey were automatically recorded. Print versions of the survey were brought to all public meetings (whether related to the agriculture plan or not), and were also made available at select businesses and public locations, as well as many public events as possible, such as the Nechako Valley Exhibition, Bulkley-Valley Exhibition, Vanderhoof Trade Show and the Agriculture Plan Workshops. Completed hard copy surveys were accepted at any Municipal Office or public library in the Regional District and were mailed back to the RDBN office and were manually recorded.

Two separate surveys were created – one designed for consumers of agricultural products, and one designed for producers of agricultural products.

1.5.1 Producer Survey Results

The RDBN received 55 responses to the Producers Survey. While profitability remains the greatest challenge to agricultural production within the region, difficulties with government regulations and a lack of government support also present a significant barrier. Many regional producers find marketing their farm products to be especially challenging, due to market distance and access as well as limited resources to apply to marketing. Marketing support was identified as a priority, followed by support for advanced farm practice and government regulations.

Locally, farm products are primarily sold directly to consumers from the farm or through the farmers' market. A significant portion of locally produced agricultural products are being sold outside the region. Almost all regional producers advertise their products through word-of-mouth, while only a fraction take advantage of other forms of advertising.

Opinion is divided as to the resources needed most by regional producers, therefore it appears that producers could use increased support for all aspects of agricultural production. This includes increased government financial support, assistance navigating government regulations, business development and marketing support, strengthened farmers' markets, development of innovative farm practices and products, and training opportunities.

Farm operation challenges include the costs of entering the industry especially in the context of the current lack of profitability. The main issues remain: lack of market access, limited industry profitability, real or perceived increasingly restrictive government regulations, lack of infrastructure and support, increasing costs of production, limited productivity and lack of new entrants.

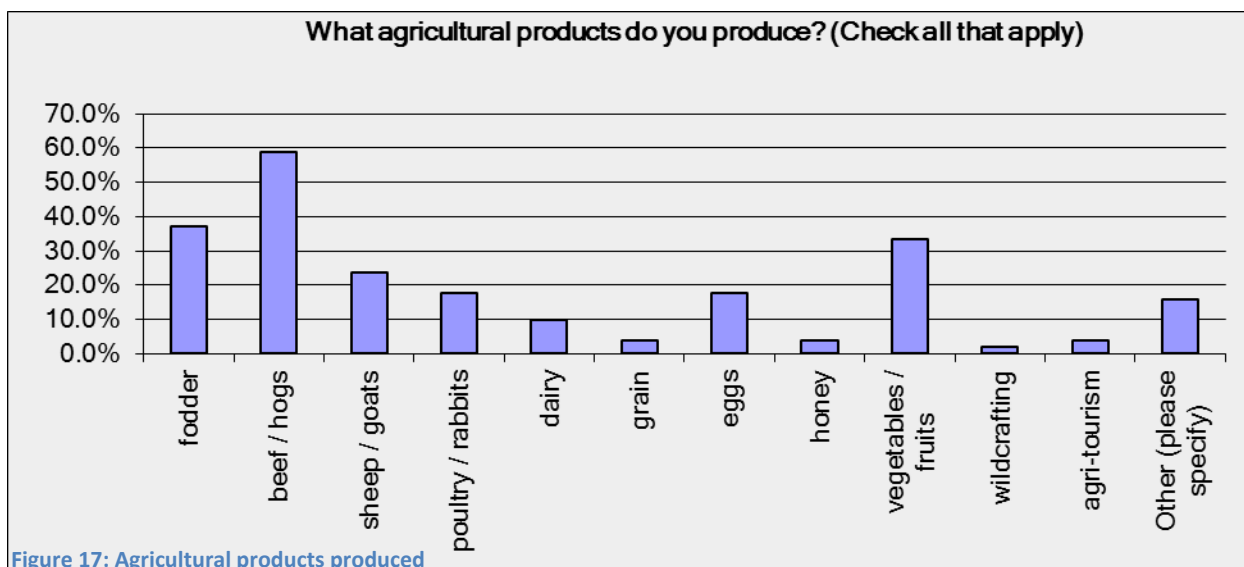


Figure 17: Agricultural products produced

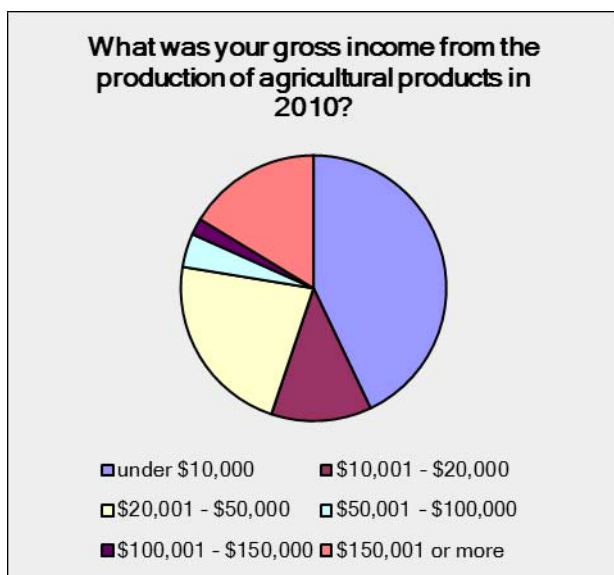


Figure 18: Gross income from agriculture

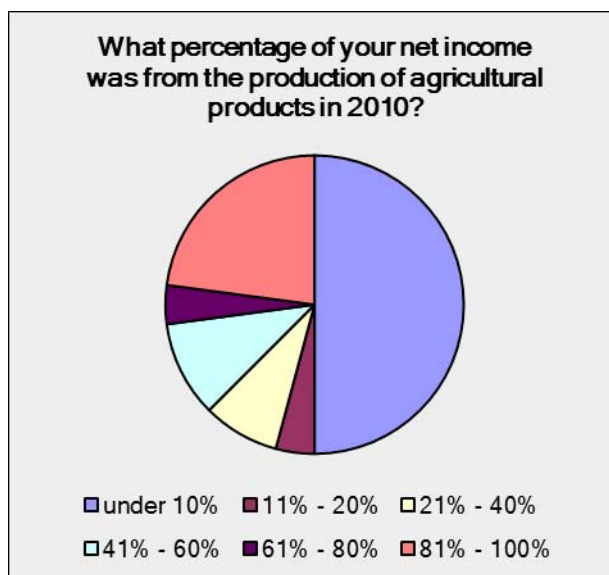


Figure 20: Percentage of net income from agriculture

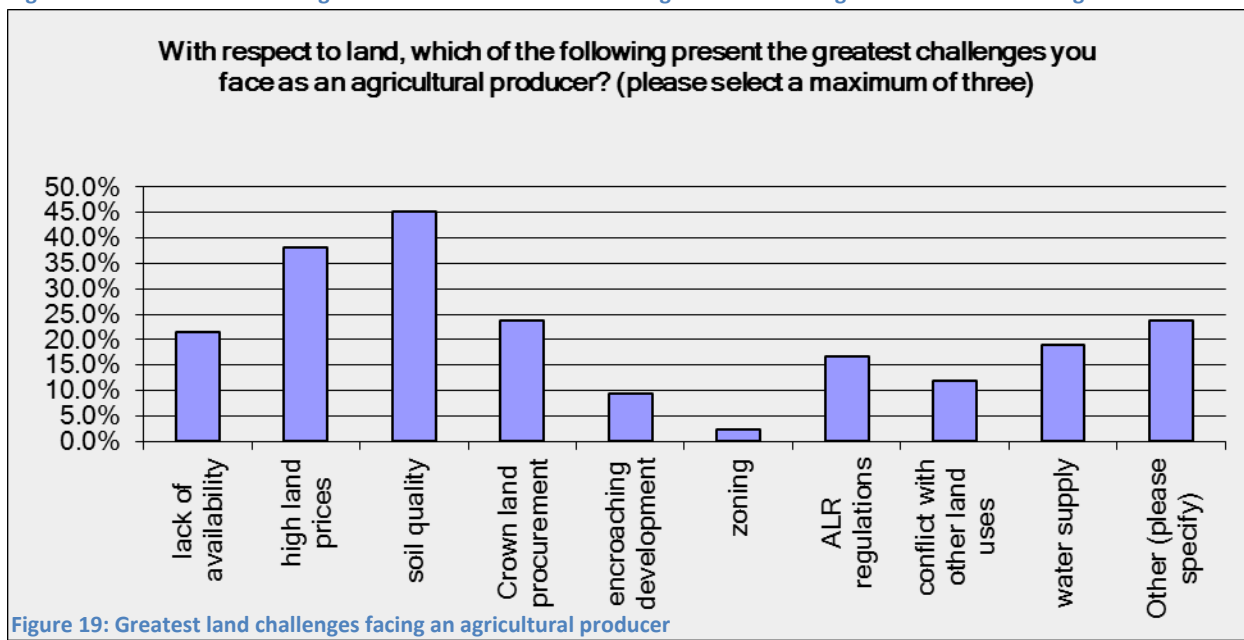


Figure 19: Greatest land challenges facing an agricultural producer

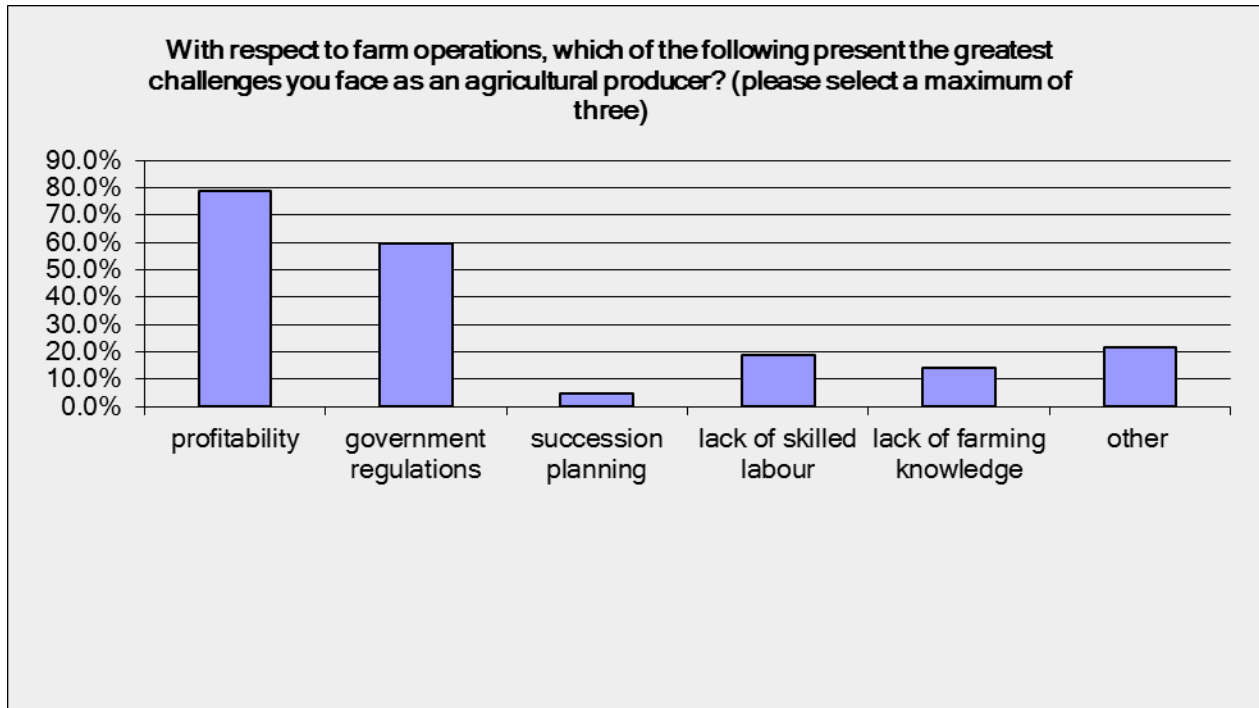


Figure 21: Greatest operational challenges facing an agricultural producer

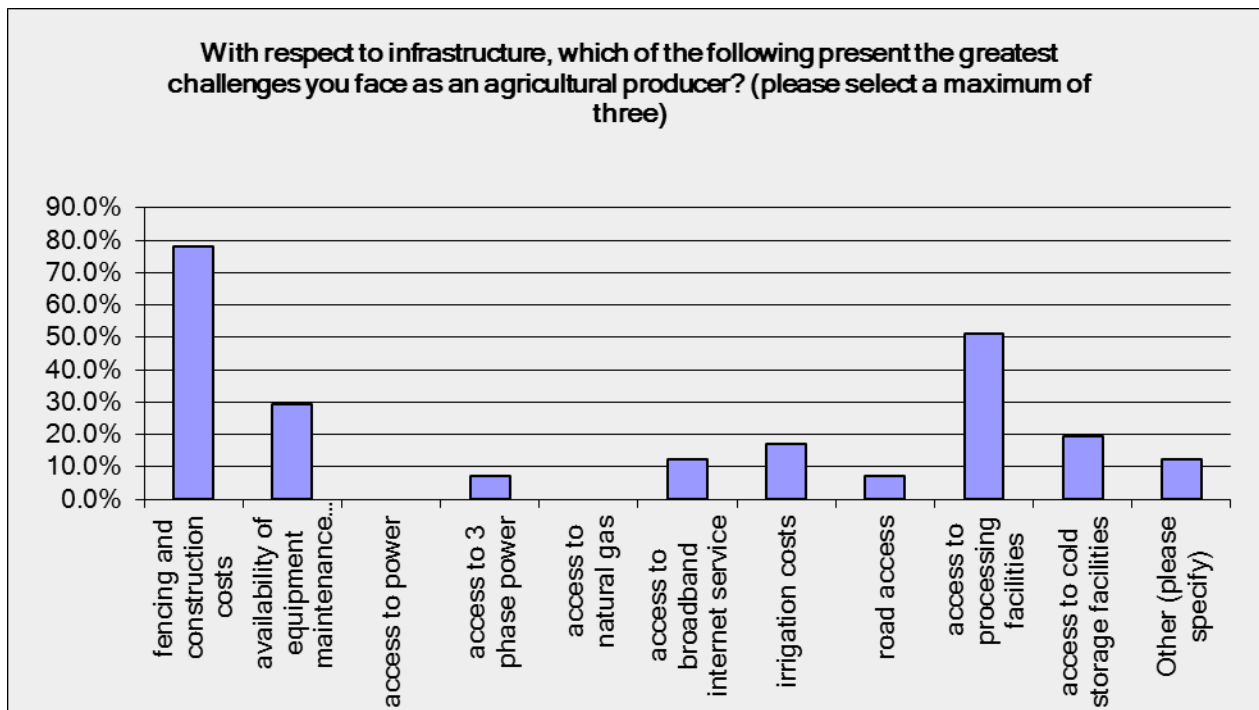


Figure 22: Greatest infrastructure challenges facing an agricultural producer

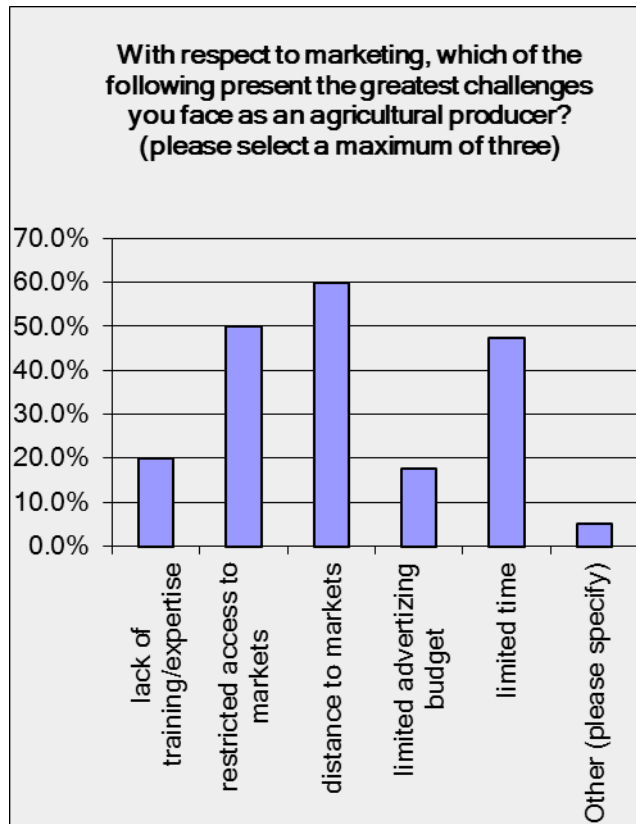


Figure 24: Greatest marketing challenges facing an agricultural producer

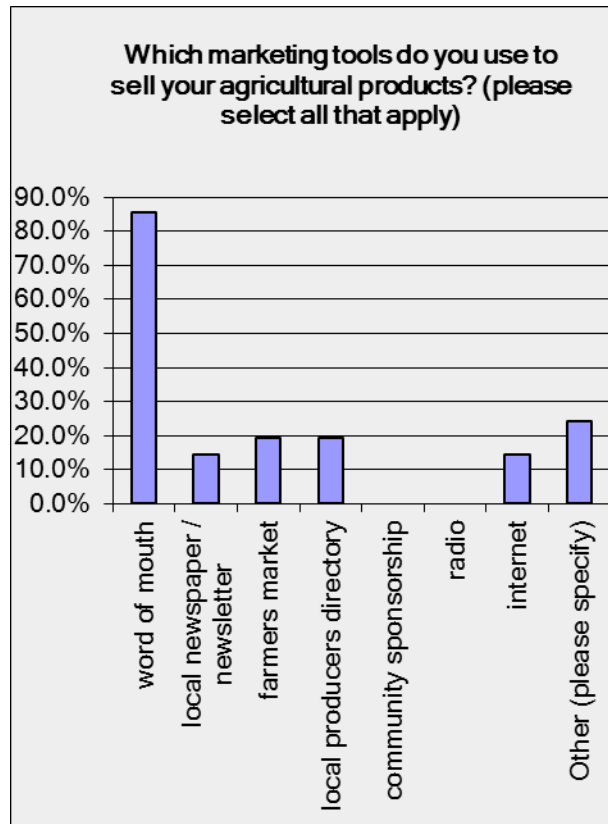


Figure 23: Marketing tools used to sell agricultural products

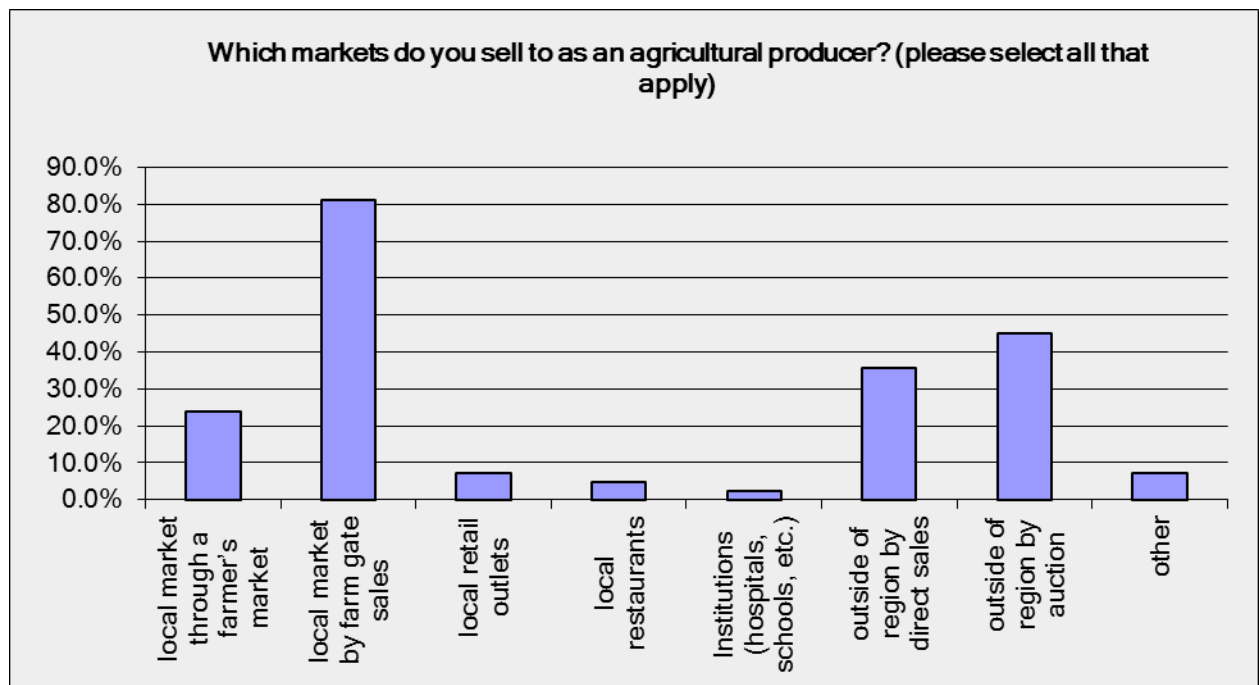


Figure 25: Markets sold to by agricultural producers

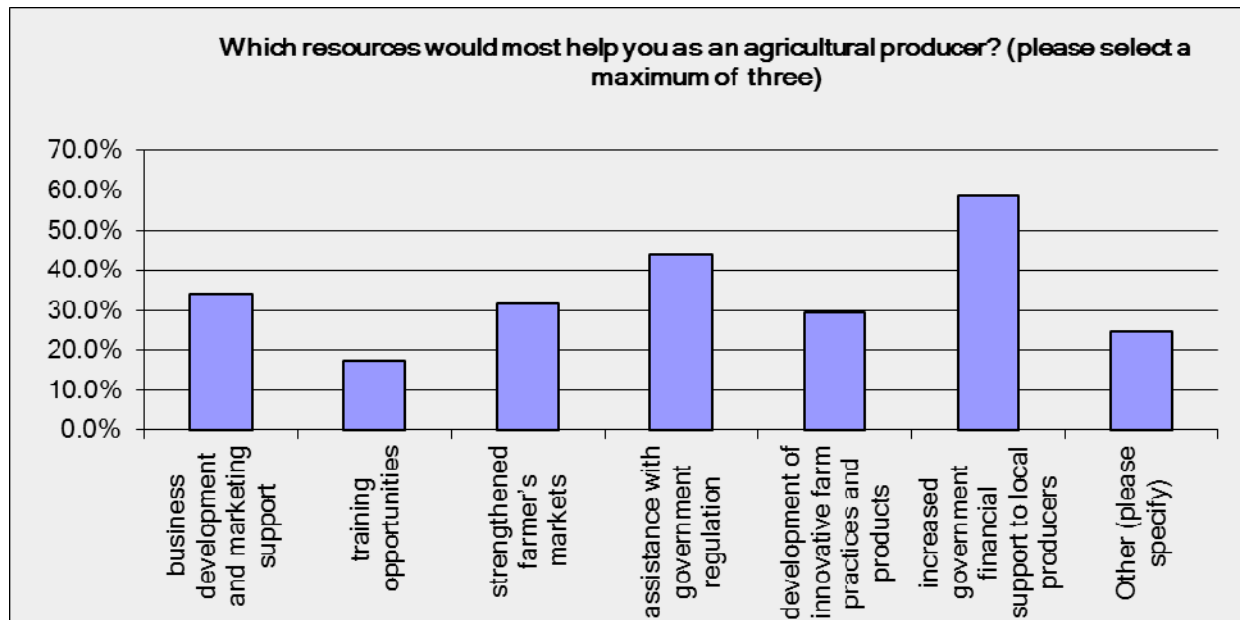


Figure 26: Most helpful resources to agricultural producers

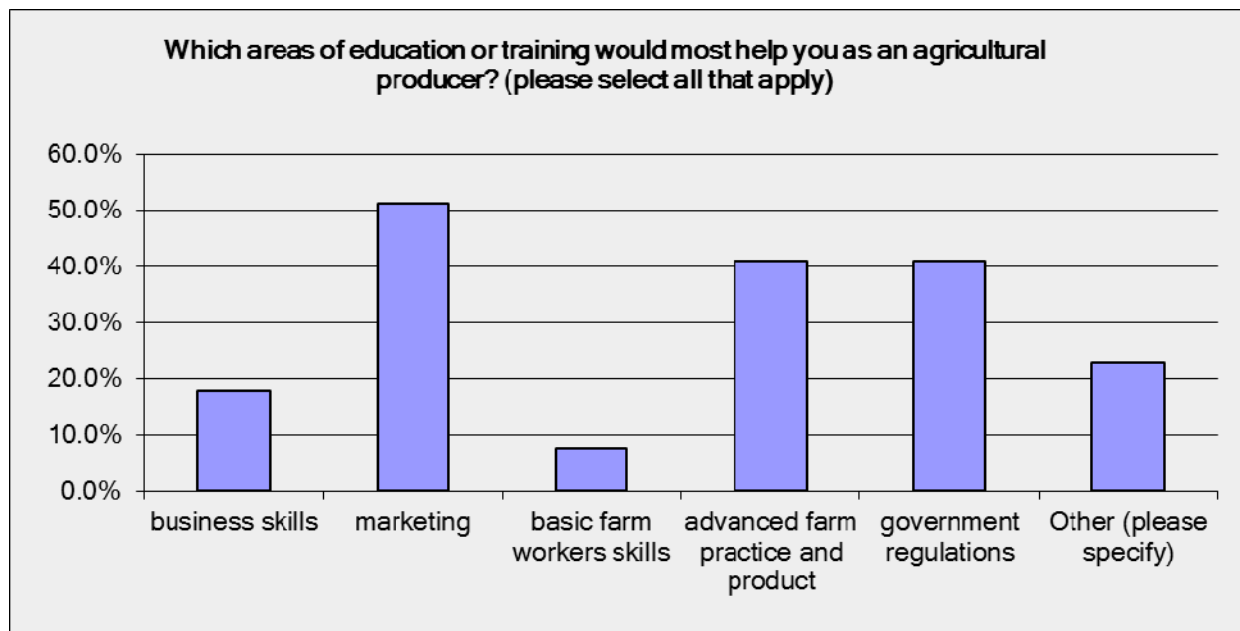


Figure 27: Most helpful education or training for agricultural producers

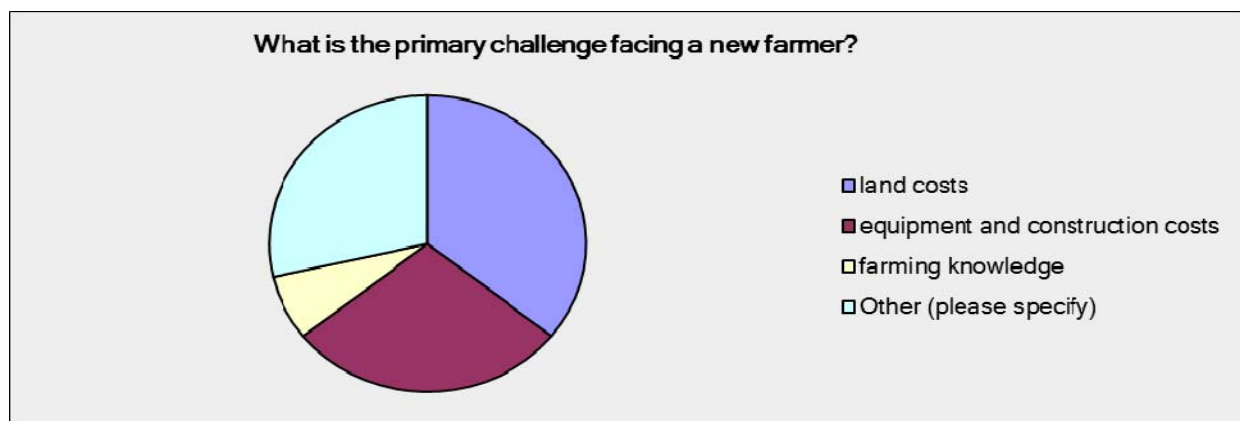


Figure 28: Primary challenge facing new farmers

1.5.2 Consumer Survey Results

The RDBN received 113 responses to the Consumer Survey. The survey respondents expressed strong support for local agriculture for reasons including product preference, support for the economy and food security. While grocery stores represent the primary source for food products, many consumers also shop at the local farmers' market, bakery, deli/meat shop as well as directly from farms and fruit trucks. Many respondents noted that they have backyard gardens that supply fresh produce during the growing season. It should be noted that the survey results may reflect that the people who have taken the time to fill out these survey are those that are already interested in local foods.

Most consumers are satisfied with their local farmers' market. Those that were unsatisfied expressed a desire for more quantity and variety of produce and some expressed dissatisfaction with product pricing. Most respondents also expressed interest in participating in a local food box program, especially if the products were locally produced, available year-round and reasonably priced. There was equal preference for all varieties of farm products such as meat, dairy, eggs, fruit and vegetables.

Consumers reported that the primary reasons for a preference for local foods were if they were locally produced and high quality, followed by freshness and price. All respondents would like to see local food products made available in grocery stores and restaurants. Most people would be willing to pay about 10% more for locally produced food. The best ways to encourage consumption of local food products would be to increase accessibility, provide more variety, and increase knowledge about local farm practices and build relationships with producers.

While most producers were inclined to advertise their products through word of mouth, the consumers also considered a wider variety of methods, including local media, producer directories, and the internet. The benefits of local food consumption were divided in importance, with many comments suggesting that support for the local economy, increased food quality and freshness, and increased food security were equal.

The barriers to local food consumption that were identified included not knowing where to purchase local food, limited availability and variety of local foods, inconvenience to purchase, price, and the restrictions on farm gate sales. The ways to support local agriculture that were identified included assisting producers with government regulation, subsidizing local agriculture ventures, encouraging grocery stores to sell local products, improve agricultural infrastructure, provide financial incentives to local producers, provide more agricultural education, and support farmers' markets and local food directories.



Figure 29: Where do you shop for food



Figure 31: Farmers' market satisfaction

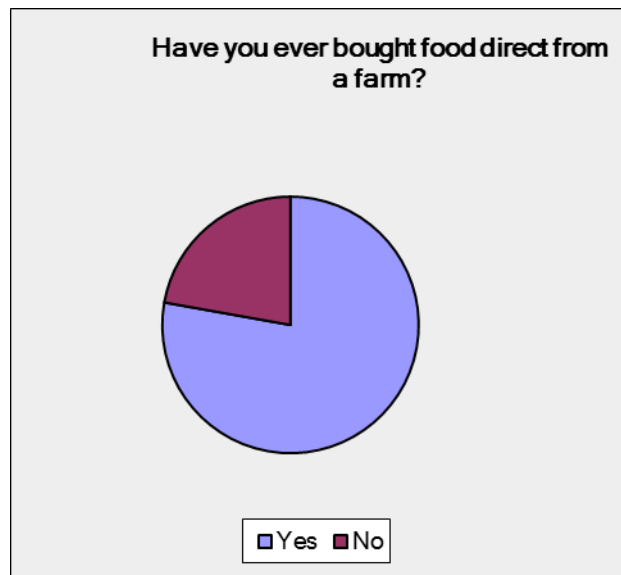


Figure 30: Have you ever bought food direct from a farm

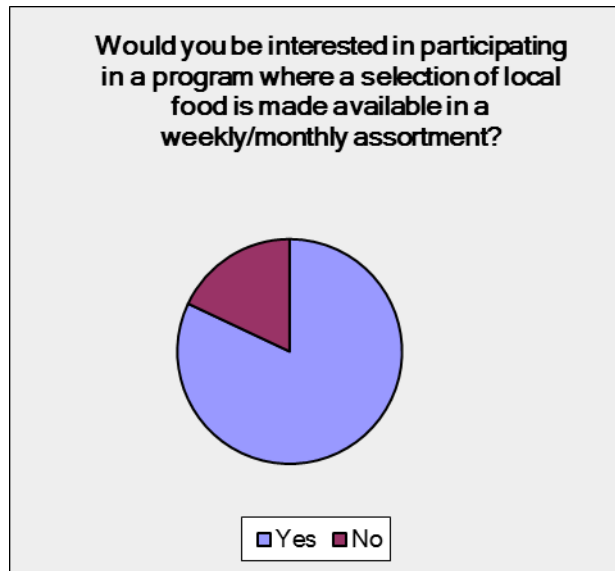


Figure 33: Interest in a 'food box' type program

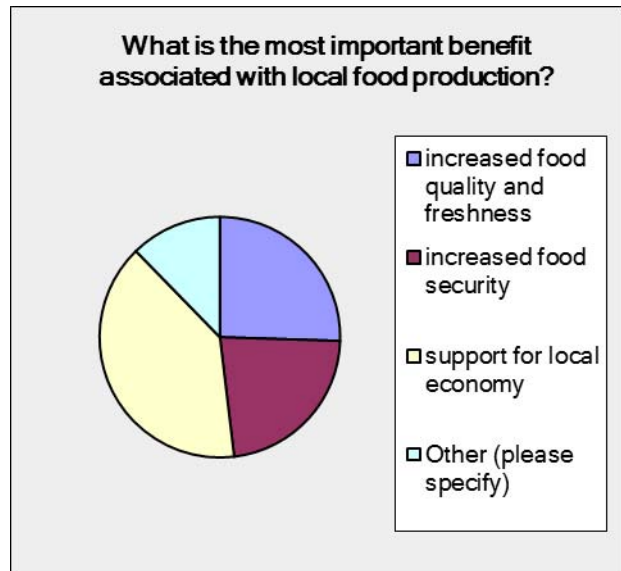
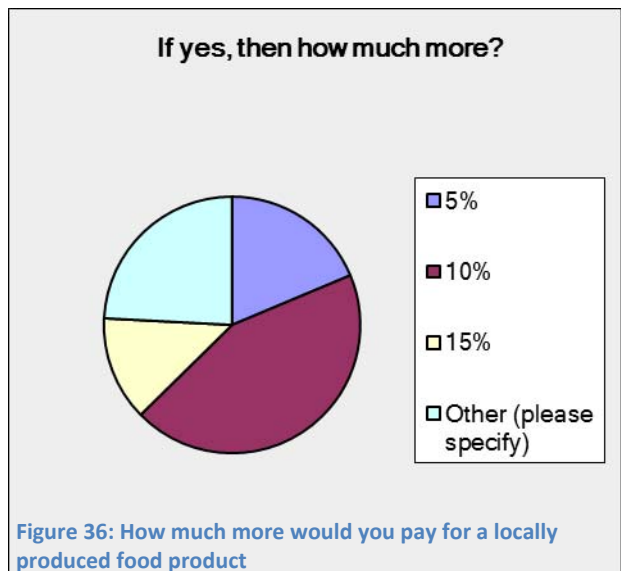
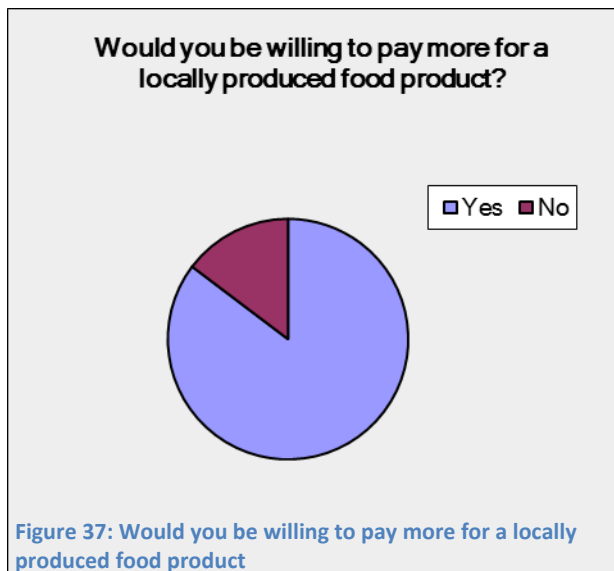


Figure 32: Most important benefit of local food production



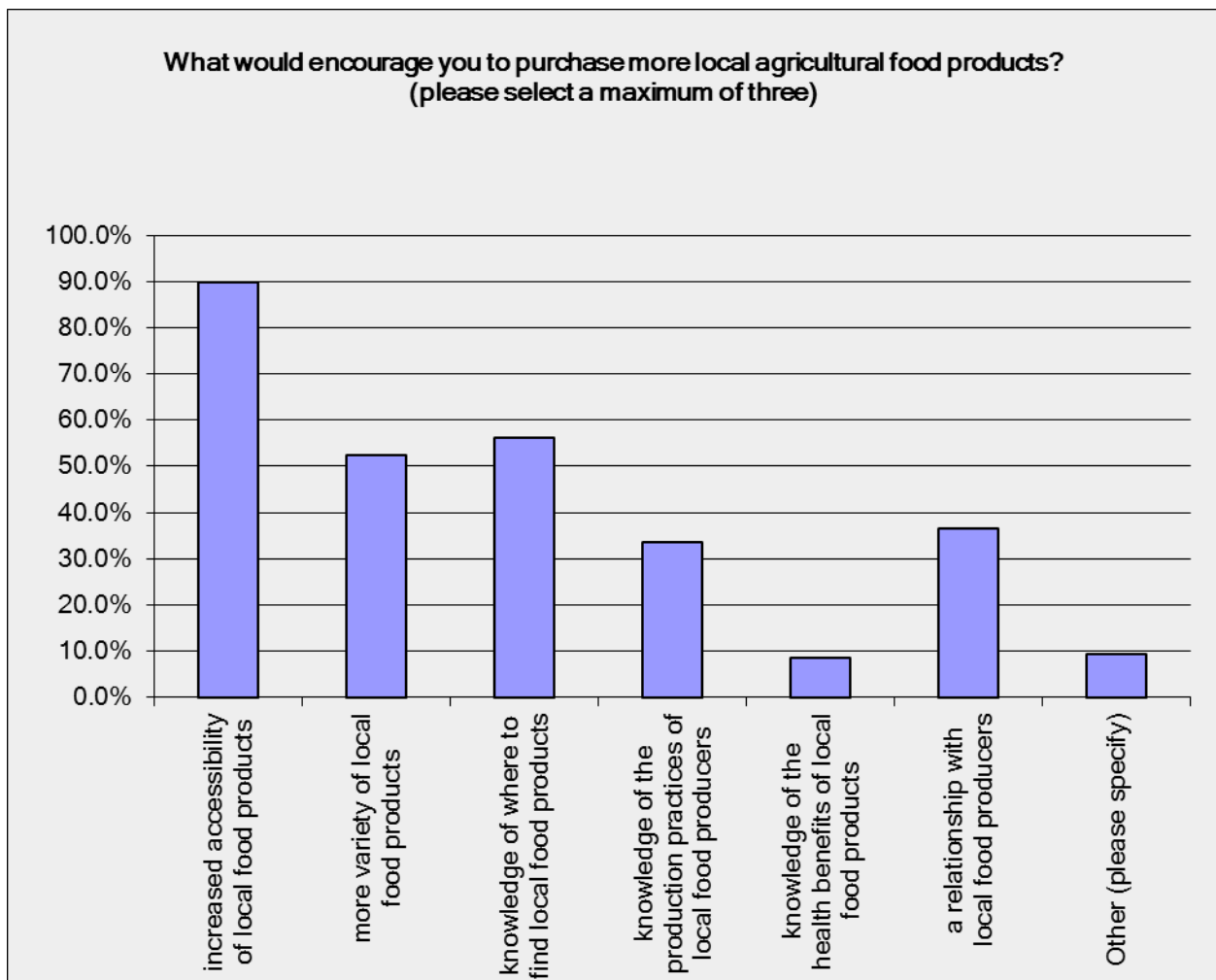


Figure 38: What would encourage you to purchase more local agricultural food products

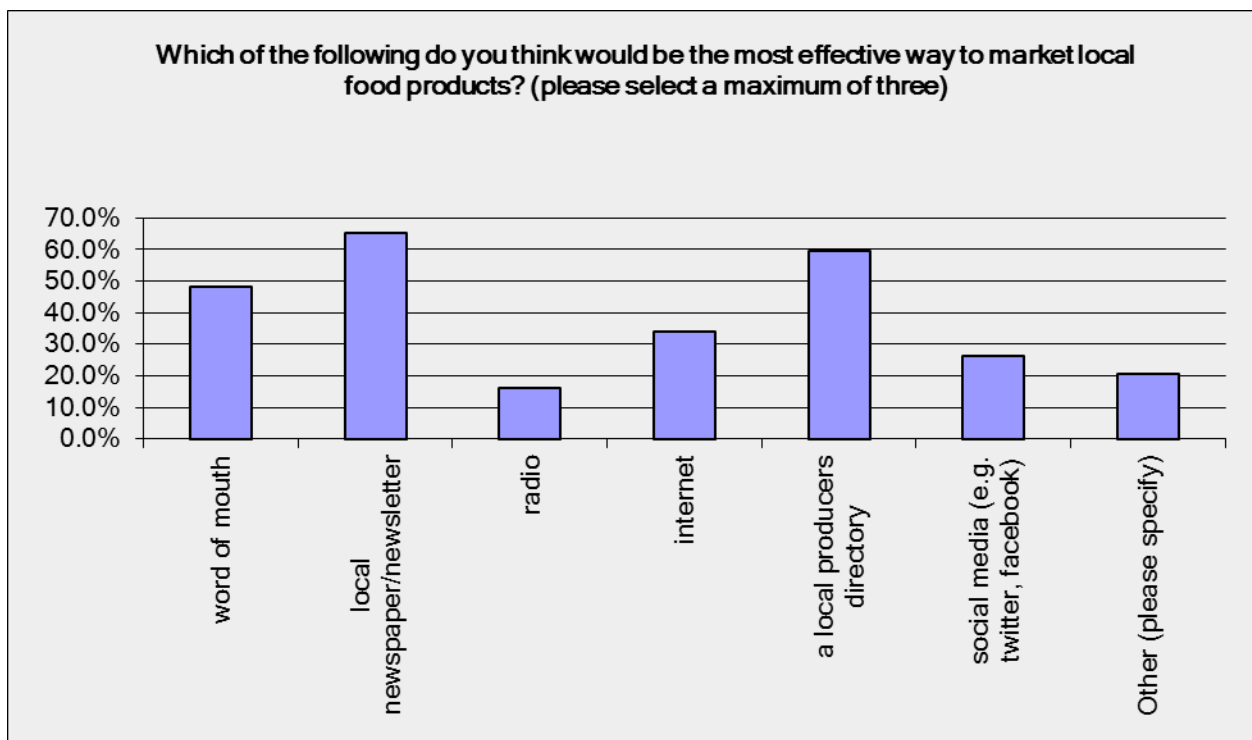
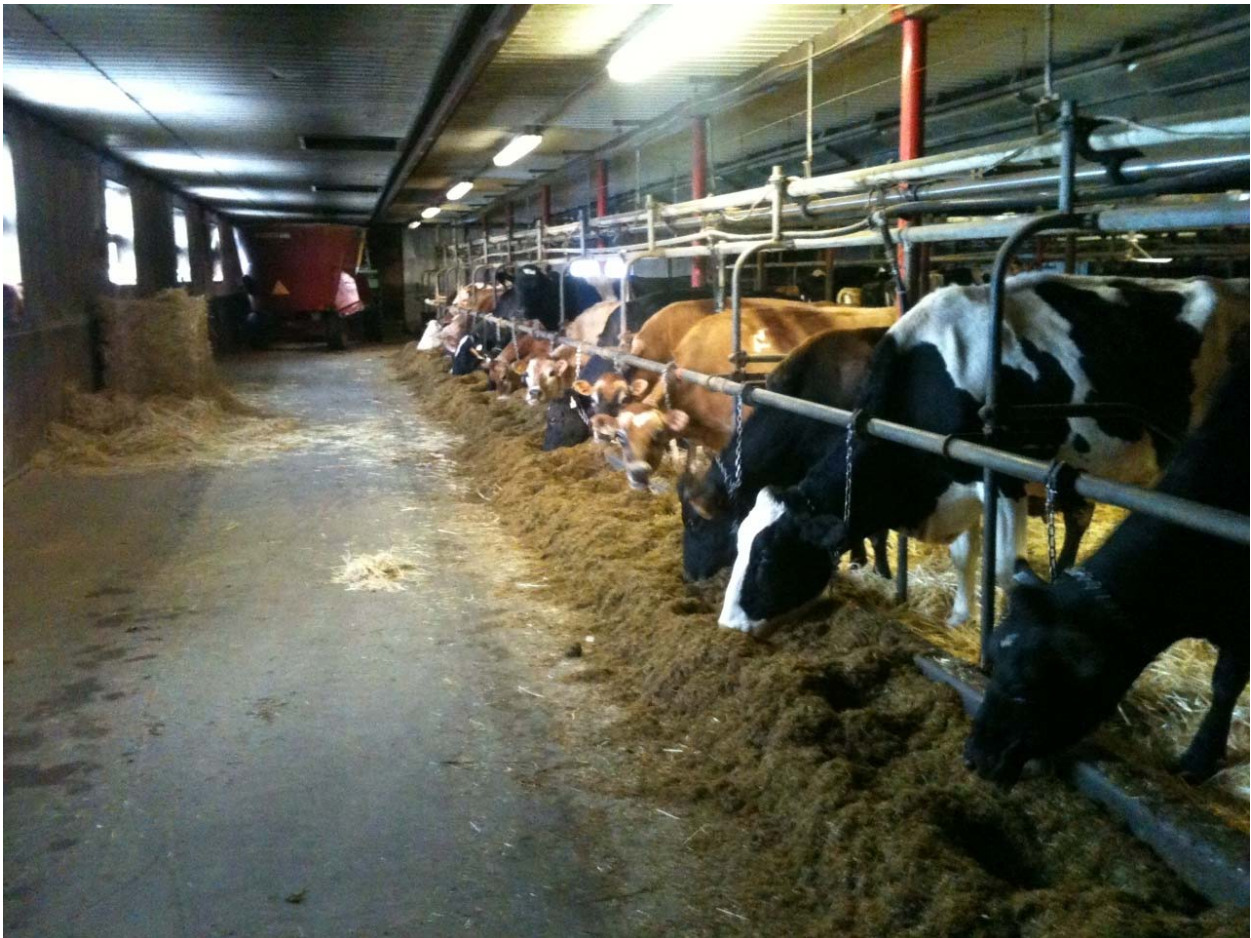


Figure 39: What is the most effective way to market local food products

Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako

AGRICULTURE PLAN

SECTION 2: DISCUSSION OF ISSUES



2.1 Land Issues

2.1.1 Land Costs

Agricultural land prices in the RDBN have remained relatively stable, and are lower than many other areas of the province. This can provide a competitive advantage to farmers in the region as low land values reduce the costs associated with starting a new farm or expanding an existing farming operation. This land value is the result of limited demand for residential land. Also, the low value of agricultural land is also reflective of the existing lack of demand for farmland given the challenges facing agricultural producers in the region.

Much of the productive agricultural land in the RDBN is within the Agricultural Land Reserve, which restricts its potential use for non-agricultural purposes. However, there remains some pressure to develop agricultural land for residential for other purposes. This demand is higher in the Bulkley-Valley. The demand for residential development in the rural areas around the District of Vanderhoof and Fort St. James is also expected to rise as growth associated with mining activity in the area occurs. This demand is, and will be, reflected in the increased value of agricultural land in these areas. Unfortunately, the increased agricultural land value does not appear to be the result of increased demand for land for agricultural purposes.

2.1.2 Leasing Agricultural Land

The renting or leasing of agricultural land is a common practice within the region and is an economical way for a producer to make use of additional land without the upfront land purchase cost. Land can be rented/leased for agricultural purposes from the Crown or from a private property owner. Crown land leases are restricted to those who meet certain qualifications. If a farmer is granted an agricultural lease, they may have an option to purchase the land. Private land rentals/leases are agreements negotiated solely between the property owner and the farmer, and can therefore be written to suit individual needs. The document: *A Guide to Farmland Access Agreements* has been prepared for the Community Farms Program by The Land Conservancy of BC for use by landowners, farmers, communities and other land trusts.

Private Rental of Farm Land

In parts of the region there is a growing trend of high-quality agricultural land being purchased for residential use. The property owners often allow the agricultural land to lie fallow or allow minimal agricultural use in order to obtain farm status. The residential use of agricultural land is driving up land prices and creating a barrier for new farmers trying to purchase farm land in certain areas. Additionally, large tracts of fallow land easily become infested with invasive weeds, which spread to adjacent farms and increases weed control costs for those farmers. One potential solution to this issue is to encourage residential users of agricultural land to rent the unused land to a farmer. The land owner may benefit by earning income from the lease agreement, maintaining the value of their property, and possibly acquiring farm status for the property and paying less property tax. The farmer would benefit by being able to access productive farm land at a reduced cost.

There are several different legal ways to set up a farm land rental agreement including lease, profit à prendre, license, or memorandum of understanding. Legalizing a farm land rental agreement provides clarity of communication and security for both the farmer and the land owner. In addition, land use agreements must be in writing in order for them to be enforceable. The preparation of any legal agreement should be undertaken with the assistance of legal counsel.

Leases are the most formal type of agreement that are best suited to whole properties. They transfer the most property rights (use and occupation) to the farmer, can be used to obtain a mortgage, and are recognized under the *Assessment Act*. Leases can be registered on title, which makes the lease run with the land, no matter who owns it. A landowner's rights to actual possession of the land are suspended during a lease, which can affect the value of the property, should the owner wish to sell it.

Leases that apply to a portion of a property and that are longer than three years are considered subdivisions under Section 73 of the *Land Title Act*. The subdivision can be a standard fee simple division of it can be a leasehold subdivision, which expires at the end of the lease. A lot created by leasehold subdivision cannot be sold separately from the remaining property. Like a standard subdivision, a leasehold subdivision must be approved by a provincial approving officer, though the requirements may be less. A singular lease that applies to an entire property is not considered a subdivision, and does not require permission from an approving officer and the Agricultural Land Commission.

A profit à prendre (profit) is an interest in land and gives a person the right to enter another's land and take something from the land such as crops, timber, pasture, fish, game or minerals. Profits can be registered on title, do not have ALR restrictions, can pass to successors on both sides, and can be used to obtain a mortgage. As with leases, profits may decrease property value.

A licence permits a person to do something on or with someone else's property. A memorandum of understanding (MOU) is a simple agreement between two parties and may not be legally binding. Both licences and MOU cannot be registered on title and therefore apply to the people who sign them. They do not grant an interest in land, do not require ALR approval, cannot be used to obtain a mortgage and not affect property value. These types of agreements may be more suitable for shorter-term agreements.

Profits, licenses and MOU are not clearly specified in the *Assessment Act*. Therefore both the landowner and the farmer must work with BC Assessment in order for the property to acquire farm status and for the farmer to obtain bona fide farmer status and a Farmer ID card. BC Assessment generally requires evidence that the landowner has relinquished control and management of the property to the farmer. This is determined on a case-by-case basis.

Table 3: Summary of Private Farmland Access Agreements

| SUMMARY OF PRIVATE FARMLAND ACCESS AGREEMENTS | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|---|
| | Lease | Profit à Prendre | License | Memorandum of Understanding |
| Description | Gives a person the use and occupation rights of a landowner to a property or portion of property for a determined period of time in exchange for rent. The landowner retains the right to dispose of the land. When the lease is over, the land reverts to the landowner. | Gives a person the right to enter another's land and take something from the land (e.g., crops, timber, game, minerals). Thing must be part of the land and can be owned. Implies or states the rights necessary, including the right to enter the land and use as much of the surface as necessary. | Gives a person permission to do something on or with someone else's property. Can be a contract. | Is an agreement between at least two persons that obliges each party to do or not to do specified things. Is not generally intended to be legally binding. Can be a contract. |
| Register With Land Title Office | Yes | Yes | No | No |
| Exclusive Possession Of Land Granted | Yes | No | No | No |
| Multiple On One Property | More than a 3 year lease requires subdivision approval | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| ALR | Requires ALC approval | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Non-ALR | Requires Approval Officer approval | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Length | Any length of time | Any length of time | Any length of time | Any defined length of period |
| Mortgage Of Instrument | Yes | Yes | No | No |
| Sub-Agreement Possible | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Action For Recovery Of Loss | If tenant is wrongfully evicted from the leased land, they can bring action to recover the leased land. | The profit holder can have action for damages for loss of their interest in land. May also have an action for specific performance of the profit. | If the licensor breaks the terms of the licence, the licensee can only recover monetary damages. | If a party breaks the terms of the MOU, recovery only for monetary damages. |

Taken From: A Guide to Farmland Access Agreements, Community Farms Program, The Land Conservancy of BC and Farm Folk/City Folk

Extensive Agriculture Leases on Crown Land

Extensive Agricultural Use of Crown land is defined as soil bound cultivation to produce cereal, seed, forage, vegetable or fruit crops for mechanical harvesting. Except in special circumstances, Extensive Agricultural Leases are only available to existing farmers. Existing farmers must have 50% of the arable area of their property in active cultivated production, with a minimum of 40 hectares cultivated, including 25% of the most recent Crown land acquisition. The Crown land applied for must be within about 15 kilometers of the applicants privately owned farm. In addition, a farmer can only have one agricultural lease at a time. The size of a lease is usually limited to 64 ha and the standard length of term is 30 years.

The annual cost for an Extensive Agricultural Lease is set at 3% of the market value of the property at the time the lease is issued, to a minimum of \$500. The cost may be re-evaluated half-way through the lease term. If the lessee proposes any improvements or changes to the land, a security deposit or bond may be required, at a value up to 10% of the estimated timber value or a minimum of 10% of the market value of the land. All extensive agricultural lease applications are required to be advertised locally. If there is more than one eligible interested party a limited public auction or a sealed tender bid is held, with the highest bid getting the lease.

The option to purchase a lease, which is only available within the Northern Service Region, applies only to Crown land parcels of which the arable portion constitutes 15 hectares or more. Leases can be purchased at any time during the lease term if 25% of the arable land is cultivated. The purchase price is set at the market value of the property at the time the lease was issued plus the value of any remaining merchantable timber. Parcels that do not qualify for a lease-purchase may be available to existing farmers on a direct sale basis. Direct sales are available in all regions and are priced at full market value of the land plus the value of the merchantable timber. Binding or consolidation of titles is a condition of sale for all lease purchases and direct sales under the extensive agriculture policy.

Intensive Agriculture Leases on Crown Land

Intensive agriculture is defined as the use of Crown land parcels of an area of 15 ha or less for the commercial production of animals, fruits and/or vegetables. Under the Intensive Agriculture Program, Crown land is made available to encourage and support the sustainable development of commercial farms while retaining Crown land for agricultural use. Examples of intensive agriculture include poultry farms, dairy farms, market gardens, greenhouses, nurseries, piggeries and feed lots.

Crown land can be applied for under the intensive agriculture policy for purchase or lease. The standard length of term for a lease is 30 years. The annual cost for an intensive agricultural lease is set at 5% of the land value to a minimum of \$500. Applicants for intensive agricultural leases are not required to be existing farmers. Applications are only available through public competition except in areas designated by the province for intensive agricultural use.

Grazing and Hay-Cutting Leases on Crown Land

Grazing and hay-cutting leases, licenses and permits are administered by Range staff in the Ministry of Natural Resource Operations. Leases are issued under the *Land Act*, while licenses and permit are issued under the *Range Act*. New grazing leases are not being issued, however existing lessees can apply for renewal of an existing lease. Grazing and hay-cutting licenses are generally issued for 10 year term while permits are generally issued for 1-5 year terms.

2.1.3 Range Land Access and Management

Ranching in the RDBN is heavily dependent on continued access to Crown land and the proper long-term management of this resource. Economically and environmentally sustainable pasture and rangelands provide important grazing opportunities. Appropriate management of forage production on rangeland is important to the region given the relatively small percentage of land that is privately owned. The cattle industry is reliant on access to Crown range land.

The BC Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations manages the Province's Range Program under the authority of the *Range Act* and the *Forest and Range Practices Act*. The Range Program allocates and administers hay cutting and grazing agreements on Crown range lands.

The *Forest and Range Practices Act* was adopted in 2002; however, range use plans prepared under the *Forest Practices Code of BC Act* remained in effect until the end of 2005. Under the new legislation all *Range Act* agreement holders must prepare their own range use plans. Range users became responsible for developing range plans and keeping their plans current. Range users must continue to monitor the impact of their operations on Crown range and provide reports to the Ministry of Forests to show that specified results are being met on the ground. Previously, the Ministry of Forests prepared range use plans.

The use of motorized vehicles in and through range land can be a significant issue if the motorized vehicle users are not respectful of the land and infrastructure. Misuse of motorized vehicles in range land can result in fence destruction, grass degradation, introduction and spread of invasive plants, and on rare occasion animal disturbance. Many motorized vehicle users may be unaware of their impacts on range users; therefore, public education is likely the most effective means of addressing this issue.

The Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations has an opportunity to support range users by consulting with them when forestry activities are planned and executed within range lands. The Ministry can also support range users by educating logging contractors about preserving fence lines and other agricultural infrastructure when operating in active range lands. In addition, it is important to ensure that Crown lands that are dedicated to forage as the primary use be protected from the planting or replanting of trees.

Like others that rely on access to Crown land, range users are faced with uncertainty associated with First Nations land claims. Range lands can cover vast areas of land and will invariably overlap with lands under treaty negotiation. First Nations have differing approaches to Crown land use, which leads to uncertainty by Crown land users. For some range users this can be a significant cause of uncertainty, and may impede access to Crown lands.

The mountain pine beetle epidemic is already resulting in increased forage production, which could benefit the cattle industry if managed appropriately. This may present other opportunities for additional agricultural leases and licenses, or community pastures.

2.1.4 Water Issues

Climate change is predicted to significantly reduce the amount and timing of water available for agriculture in the future. The provincial government is taking measures to maintain water security for the agricultural sector. These measures include inventorying major water users and requiring more efficient water use. Optimizing water use improves water management during times of drought, long-term climate change, and competing uses of the water resource. Part of on-farm water management also includes building and maintaining drainage systems, as proper water drainage is important to the productivity of agricultural land. Producers must ensure that water related activities associated with their farming operation comply with both provincial and federal aquatic habitat protection legislation, including the BC *Water Act* and the federal *Fisheries Act*. Good water quality is a key component of healthy aquatic habitats. Storage is often required to ensure that sufficient water is available for farm use later in the irrigation season when stream flows are low. Farmers often collect spring runoff into storages created by dams or dugouts, and can be the sole source of water for a farm. All storage reservoirs constructed by a dam must be licensed under the *Water Act*. In many instances dugout water storage requires a license; this is not a requirement in some regions of the province, providing the dugout is not diverting a watercourse and is filled only with surface runoff collected from a person's own property.

On June 13, 2010, a privately-owned earthen dam on a man-made reservoir on Testalinden Creek failed, causing a debris and mud torrent that severely impacted a number of homes and an agricultural area eight kilometres south of Oliver, British Columbia. The Testalinden Dam was constructed in the 1930's for the purpose of water storage and irrigation. In response to this incident the provincial government has committed to review and update the Dam Safety Regulation. Proposed changes intended to, in part, increase the accountability and awareness of dam owners to the significance of their dams. The consequence of these changes to farmers that rely on dams for irrigation purposes may be significant. Of particular concern are the annual costs associated with engineering and reporting on dams, given the significant costs associated with acquiring the services of an engineer in remote rural areas.

Producers in the region have indicated that water use and the associated regulations have traditionally not been an issue. There is little large scale irrigation and water is a plentiful resource in the region. There is some concern that agricultural water usage may become metered in the future, should water resources require additional management.

The *Water Act*, established in 1909, is the legislation that manages the diversion and use of provincial water resources. The Province is currently undertaking a process to review the *Water Act*. In March of 2010 the Province introduced the “Water Act Modernization Discussion Paper”, held a workshop regarding the Water Act review, and requested input from local governments and other stakeholders.

In December 2010 the Province introduced the document titled “Policy Proposal on BC’s New Water Sustainability Act.” This document does not provide much new information regarding the manner in which the Province may address governance issues, and the role of local governments in the new approach to water management.

There is the potential that local government will be called upon to play a notable role in planning, managing, and regulating water use in the future if the *Water Act* is changed. The Province may establish a governance framework where they establish the environmental standards and objectives, and local governments, or other body, gains increased responsibility to ensure that those standards and objectives are met.

2.1.5 Invasive Species

Invasive Plants

The Environmental Services Department is responsible for administering the Regional District's Invasive Plant Management Program, the goals of which are to provide public education and assistance in the control of invading weed species.

Invasive plants are non-native plant species, which compete with and displace local food crops and indigenous plant species resulting in a disruption of both agricultural and wild ecosystems. The impacts of invasive plants can be ecological, genetic, or economic. The economic impacts of invasive plants are felt in a variety of areas; including agriculture, forestry and recreation and tourism industries. Economic impacts can include a reduction in crop yield, crop contamination, reduced size of productive range land or a change in local ecosystem dynamics which changes recreational uses.

Invasive plants produce a wide range of detrimental impacts on the agriculture industry, and in BC are estimated to cost the industry \$50 million per year. Farmers and ranchers lose millions of dollars in crop revenue annually, and also pay millions of dollars for control measures, such as herbicides and cultivation. Invasive plants can reduce crop yields by 10 to 15%, as well as reduce crop quality and market opportunities. In addition, many invasive plants act as hosts for insects and crop diseases and negatively affect the health of livestock.

Four main methods of management exist when dealing with invasive plants; prevention, mechanical treatment, chemical treatment and biological treatment. Prevention is the best form of management but is often very hard to accomplish. Public education and awareness and programs such as 'Early Detection and Rapid Response' are used to this end. Mechanical treatment involves the removal of plants by hand or by using a machine such as a brush saw. Chemical treatment, or the use of pesticides and herbicides, can be very effective in the control

of invasive plant species but these chemicals must be used in an appropriate manner to minimize the chance of killing non-target or desirable plant species. Biological treatment involves the release of naturally occurring "enemies" such as insects to kill invasive plants.

The Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako is a member of the Northwest Invasive Plant Council (NWIPC). Since 2005, invasive plant control has been conducted using a "single agency approach". Various organizations, including the RDBN, Ministry of Transportation, Ministry of Forests, BC Transmission Corporation and others, contribute funding to the NWIPC. The contributed monies are pooled and then distributed in a coordinated fashion to achieve on the ground control of invasive plants and public education. In 2012 the Ministry of Agriculture has eliminated all financial contribution to the NWIPC.

Adequate funding is the cornerstone of an effective invasive plant control program. Over the past several years government funding for the NWIPC is becoming more and more limited. This reduces the ability of the organization to control existing infestations, identify new infestations, and raise public awareness in our region. Additionally, the lack of funding and resources committed to invasive plant management by BC Parks and CN Rail is allowing the spread of invasive plants throughout the province, including the RDBN.

In April of 2011 the provincial government announced it was funding the NWIPC's umbrella organization, the Invasive Plant Council of BC with \$3 million for a new program called Take Action. The intent of this program is to train and hire up to 150 people to help prevent and reduce the spread of invasive plants around the province. The Invasive Plant Council of BC will distribute this funding to the 12 Regional Weed Committees to place local, multi-person Take Action Teams around the province.

There are about 70 plant species that could become or already are invasive in the RDBN. The most problematic species in the region include Canada thistle, oxeye daisy, hawkweed, and knapweed. However, due to the vast extent of the infestations of these plant species, little or no control is regularly undertaken. Canada thistle is widely dispersed in the region particularly along roadsides. There are some areas where Canada thistle is impacting or threatening to impact forage production on range and pasture. Oxeye daisy has a wide distribution in the region and is very abundant in some areas. Some private pastures and crown range are experiencing serious forage losses due to oxeye daisy. Hawkweeds have become problem pasture weeds in central BC and are spreading through the undergrowth of mountain pine beetle damaged forests.

The plants species most targeted for control measures within the region are field scabious, common tansy and spotted knapweed. Field scabious infestations can be found in the Buck Flats area (south of Houston) and the Fort Fraser areas. It competes with forage stands and native pastures and is capable of invading undisturbed areas. Common tansy is present in all agricultural reporting regions of the province, and is considered an undesirable forage and may be toxic to livestock. Knapweed, especially spotted knapweed, has numerous infestation sites throughout the region. If uncontrolled, knapweed can cause serious economic and environmental damage.

The province of British Columbia needs to make a commitment to invest significantly more money in invasive plant control throughout the province, especially on road right-of-ways. Farmers must bear the cost of continuous invasive plant infestations that originate from adjacent road, and CN and BC Hydro rights-of-way. The Ministry of Transportation remains a major contributor to the Invasive Species Council of British Columbia, and is commended for its continued support. BC Hydro does participate in invasive plant control to a limited extent. CN takes limited action to deal with weed control in their rights-of-way, beyond the extent of the tracks. CN has stated that their primary concern is spraying the ballast area and that the remaining area of the right-of-way is sprayed when funds are available. CN deals with specific areas of weed infestations on an individual basis when notified. Generally, the weed control measures implemented by CN appear insufficient in controlling the spread of invasive plants along railway corridors. As noted the Ministry of Agriculture has recently withdrawn all contributions to weed control in the region. It is important for all jurisdictions to contribute to the Invasive Species Council of British Columbia without fettering the allocation of resources.

Solutions for invasive plant control that are appropriate, or practical, in the southern parts of the province are not necessarily suitable for use in the north. We have our unique situations and issues, and at times require an approach designed specifically for our situation. There needs to be incentives for private weed control and long-term plans for control that include increased public education. However, it would be inappropriate to enforce the Weed Control Act to any notable extent on private land owners until the provincial government provides effective weed control on public land.

Invasive Animals

Invasive animals can be found in marine, aquatic and terrestrial habitats in BC. Some are accidental introductions and other were intentional introductions to provide food or for fishing and hunting. Invasive species may also be native, as changes in the landscape and climate have allowed species to spread into areas where they had not been previously found.

Invasive species can flourish in their new environment and can be very disruptive to natural ecosystems, native animals, and farming activities. Their impacts can result from increased predation of other species, increased competition for a food source, the introduction of disease, and habitat alteration and destruction. Eradication of any invasive mammal species is rare and successful control is more likely when a long-term ecosystem-wide strategy is employed. Currently there are no known issues in the region of invasive non-native species. There are issues associated with the expansion of native species such as elk and white-tailed deer.

2.1.6 Environmental Protection

The agriculture industry is responsible for operating in a manner that does not degrade the natural environment under provincial legislation including, but not limited to, the *Waste Management Act*, *Water Act*, *Fish Protection Act*, and *Fisheries Act*. Agricultural lands are often associated with sensitive environmental features and important wildlife habitat such as wetlands, rivers, and creeks, and their riparian areas. Maintaining the integrity of these

sensitive areas, protecting wildlife habitat and air quality and conserving biodiversity are important goals.

A critical component of sustainable agricultural practice includes the responsible use and protection of water features and riparian areas. Under the provincial *Water Act*, approval must be obtained from the Ministry of Environment before doing any work in and about a stream. The *Water Act* also stipulates that a water licence is required to take water from a surface water source. A Riparian Self-Assessment Workbook has been developed to assist producers in determining the level of riparian protection that is acceptable to the environmental agencies in agricultural areas. A *Fisheries Act* approval is required from Department of Fisheries and Oceans for maintenance works in channelized and natural streams. The *Fisheries Act* prescribes that irrigation pumps and water intakes on water sources with fish present are properly screened to prevent fish from getting trapped. No licence or permit is required to access groundwater at the present time

As land managers, BC farmers act as stewards of the environment. This role is reinforced through provincial and federal environmental protection legislation. Environmental sustainability is achieved by incorporating management practices into agricultural systems that minimize the negative impacts on air, soil, and water quality. The costs associated with these practices and other environmental protection measures can often be significant. Agricultural producers should be supported to ensure environmental regulations can be met or exceeded without the producer incurring overwhelming costs. Forms of support could include assistance in navigating regulations, evaluations of farm practices, or incentive programs for exceptional environmental stewardship.

The Murray Creek Rehabilitation Project is worthy of note as a community based initiative that has achieved significant successes within the Murray Creek watershed, near Vanderhoof. The project, spearheaded by a team of dedicated local residents, has brought together government, the private sector, and local farmers to raise awareness of stewardship issues, undertake stream revitalization projects, and facilitate academic research on the watershed. This type of cooperative community based initiative is of significant benefit to the community and to the long-term future of the agricultural industry in the region.

In February of 2011, the Minister of Agriculture adopted a standard for agricultural building setbacks from watercourses, as authorized under s.916 of the *Local Government Act*. This standard is described in the factsheet titled “Agricultural Building Setbacks from Watercourses in Farming Areas.” The setbacks apply to developed agricultural land, including land that has been cleared for crop production or land that is farmed in an active manner.

Environmental Farm Plans

Administered by the BC Agricultural Research and Development Corporation (ARDCORP), the environmental farm plan program (EFP) was created to improve the environmental sustainability of farms by providing funding for on-farm actions to reduce environmental risks associated with farming. The intention of the program is to enable producers to identify their farm’s environmental strengths, prioritize any potential risks to the environment, and take advantage of

tools and techniques available to manage those risks. Farmers who have completed an EFP may be eligible for implementation funding through the Growing Forward Agreement “On-Farm Action” Beneficial Management Practices (BMP) Program. Province-wide over 700 producers participated in the 2008-2009 program year, 523 EFPs were completed and 550 Beneficial Management practice projects were completed. From January 2005 to June 2011, 117 farms in the region covering 99,122+ hectares have voluntarily completed environmental farm plans for their agricultural operations and many have proceeded with a wide range of agricultural/environmental enhancement projects identified in their individual plans.

| Number of Environmental Farm Plans in the RDBN by Farm Type in 2011 | |
|---|---------------------|
| 1 | Dairy |
| 1 | Eggs |
| 48 | Beef - cow calf |
| 7 | Beef Feeder |
| 1 | Grapes |
| 1 | Sheep and Goats |
| 1 | Other Livestock |
| 1 | Grains and Oilseeds |
| 1 | Horse |
| 55 | Unknown |
| 117 | Total |

Table 4: Number of EFPs in the RDBN in 2011

The EFP program is beneficial for both farmers and the environment, and is well received by the public and agricultural products producers. Programs such as this are supported by the Regional District and should continue to receive Provincial support. The funding opportunities associated with EFPs and other initiatives through ARDCORP, such as the Agriculture Environment & Wildlife Fund and the Agriculture Environment Partnership initiative are critical in supporting farmers in their efforts to reduce the impact of agriculture on the environment.

Public education about the efforts required by farmers to complete an EFP may increase the market for agricultural products originating from farms with an EFP. The Regional District could play a role by publically promoting the EFP program within the region, which would support and encourage good farm stewardship.

Funding for the EFP Program from the Federal government is provided through the Growing Forward framework agreement. This is a five-year Canadian agricultural policy agreement negotiated between the federal, provincial and territorial governments. It is set to expire in March 31, 2013. Growing Forward 2, the successor to the agreement, is in the final stage of negotiations and is expected to be in place by April 2013.

Operating in conjunction with the EFP Program, in 2012/13 the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada provided funding for the Beneficial Management Practice

(BMP) Program. This program provided funding support for farm operations with completed EFPs in place for certain farm improvement projects. The funding for the 2012/13 BMP program is fully allocated.

Wildlife

Consideration also needs to be given to ways to reduce conflicts between agriculture and wildlife. Some wildlife species have the potential to disrupt, damage and harm agricultural crops, livestock, farmland, farm infrastructure, and farm equipment. Under Section 26(2) of the Wildlife Act, property owners are permitted to protect their livestock from menace wildlife on their property, but are not permitted to hunt, take, trap, wound or kill wildlife to protect crops, farmland, farm infrastructure and equipment. In instances where wildlife is affecting an agricultural operation, local wildlife officers can support producers in finding solutions to manage the problem.

Fences are the most common, and usually the most effective method of protecting crops and livestock from wildlife. However, the cost of fencing can be high. It is important that farmers have information resources available to them regarding appropriate wildlife control methods. The Ministry of Environment has worked with local hunters and farmers in both the East Kootenay and Peace River regions to control deer and elk populations as part of separate pilot projects.

There are concerns being expressed by ranchers in the Telkwa and Fort St. James areas regarding a notable increase in the number of elk. Elk are a growing problem in parts of the region, because of their apparent rapid population growth, limited population control, and destructive nature. Elk can be extremely destructive to fences and silage bags and may have a notable impact on agriculture if their numbers continue to increase in ranching areas. Local wildlife biologists have been working with the Bulkley Valley Cattlemen's Association to try to find solutions for this complex issue in that area. As part of these efforts, a transect-based, aerial helicopter inventory of the elk (*Cervus canadensis*) was conducted in the core elk winter range in the Bulkley Valley on February 9, 2011. The Bulkley Elk Study area encompassed core elk winter range (based on data from the 2004-05 GPS Elk Telemetry Study, as well as from reported sightings) in the Bulkley Valley. Sixty percent (80.4 km²) of the Bulkley Elk Study area was inventoried. It is estimated that there are 48 elk within the Bulkley Elk Study area. Since there are likely elk outside this area, a conservative estimate for numbers of elk in the entire Bulkley Valley is 50-70. Based upon reported sightings and comments from agricultural landowners, the elk population appears to be stable to slightly increasing. Farmers have indicated that the Ministry of Environment estimation of Elk populations is below the numbers observed by farmers. Local farmers and the Ministry of Environment are encouraged to maintain a dialogue on this issue.

2.1.7 Sterilization of Land for Carbon Offsets

Reckitt Benckiser (Canada) Inc., a subsidiary of Reckitt Benckiser from the United Kingdom, has purchased approximately 1460 hectares of agricultural land in the rural area directly east of the District of Vanderhoof to be used for the planting of trees. Reckitt Benckiser is the world's largest producer of household products and a major producer of consumer healthcare and personal products.

The land acquisition and tree planning in the Vanderhoof rural area is associated with the company's "Trees for Change" project. This project involves the planting of more than five million trees on previously deforested land in British Columbia to offset six-years of the greenhouse gas emissions from the company's global manufacturing energy use. The trees are not being planted to obtain any type of carbon credit.

The goals of the "Trees for Change" project are positive; however, there is some concern that the planting of productive agricultural lands, in close proximity to the District of Vanderhoof, may impact the region's economy and ability of maximize food security in the long-term. The planting of trees on these lands may serve to sterilize their use for agricultural purposes for what can be assumed to be many years.

In the long-term, if additional centrally located productive agricultural lands are taken out of productivity the local economy may be negatively impacted. This will also generate the demand for lands that are further removed from the community of Vanderhoof, to be cleared of trees for agricultural use. It can be expected that the result will be a net increase in carbon generation associated with the clearing of the land and the increased transportation requirements.

Planning Department staff contacted the VP Sustainability for Reckitt Benckiser to discuss their future plans for the region. Reckitt Benckiser indicated that they do not plan to acquire more lands for the planting of trees in the region. Should their plans change they have agreed to contact the Regional District to discuss the location of future planting. The company was not able to identify the number of trees planted, the area planted, or the type of tree planted. Local sources indicate the trees planted were aspen and that the mortality rates may be high given the dry summer in 2010.

The issue of planting trees on agricultural land as a carbon offset is a serious concern. If other companies are interested in obtaining carbon offsets through the planting of trees the planting should not occur on good quality agricultural lands. The planting should be directed towards lands land that are not productive, or where there is a notable benefit to improved wildlife habitat or rehabilitation of an environmentally sensitive area.

The Agricultural Land Commission and Ministry of Agriculture should consider the need for legislative changes to address this issue and ensure it does not continue to be an issue in the future.

2.1.8 Lot Size and Non Farming Land Use

Non-Farming use of Agricultural Land

The use of agricultural land for rural residential purposes by people with little or no intention to farm has the potential to destabilize farm communities, drive up land prices, increase land use conflict, and result in weed infestations on unproductive fields. The lot sizes targeted for such use range in size, but can encompass vast acreages. However, smaller parcels are more likely to be used for rural estate or other non-farm purpose. The negative effects of rural residential estates can be somewhat diminished if the land owner rents or leases the unused agricultural land, as discussed in Section 2.1.2. of this document.

Non-farmers are often attracted to agricultural farm parcels because of the lifestyle values associated with rural living. Once an agricultural property contains an inordinately expensive home the value of the property may be pushed beyond the means of most farm families. This can prevent the property from returning to agricultural use on the future, with obvious long-term implications for maintaining cohesive farm units. The BC Ministry of Agriculture is recommending that local governments restrict the size of residential homes and/or the footprint of residential use on land within the ALR to discourage the purchase of farm land by non-farmers. Some local governments have implemented such regulations to discourage rural estates and limit the long-term impact of this non-farm use.

The impact of rural estates is not so great in the RDBN to justify such measures; and it is not expected that such measures would have much impact. The extent of development restrictions necessary to discourage non-farm use of property would also have too great an impact on a farmers use and development of land. In the RDBN the typical farming dwelling is not notably smaller than a rural estate. Also, farmers rely on a certain degree of flexibility regarding land use in order to supplement their limited farming income. Should this issue become more significant in the future, measures such as limiting road setbacks or requiring buildings to be sitting on land with lower capability may be considered.

In some instances unused farmland, which is occupied by non-agricultural producers, is rented to a neighbouring farmer and remains in production. This is a beneficial arrangement for both parties, as it generates income for the property owner and provides the producer with land at a reduced cost. However, some residential estate owners are not interested in renting out their unused farmland and allow it to run fallow.

Farm homes come in various forms and it is not uncommon for a farm home to be larger than an average suburban or rural residential home.

Lot Size

In our region the dominant form of agriculture is cattle ranching, which requires a large land base. Maintaining appropriately large parcel sizes and keeping smaller parcel residential development and other uses away from farming areas is an important factor in preserving the integrity of agricultural lands, and minimizing conflict between agriculture and non-agricultural

uses. Where there is conflict the agricultural producers can expect to incur increased operational costs to manage or reduce the conflict.

Pressure for rural residential development by property owners and developers can be significant. The incentive for farmers to capitalize on their lands subdivision potential can be great, particularly when the profits associated with agricultural production are low or non-existent. This demand must be resisted.

The Ministry of Agriculture has undertaken several land use inventories that have shown a correlation between decreasing parcel size and decreasing farming activity. In most cases farming is supplanted by residential use. The Agricultural Land Commission has found that subdividing farmland increases the likelihood of its residential use (*Bylaw Standard for Residential Uses in the Agricultural Land Reserve – A Discussion Paper*, BC Ministry of Agriculture, January 2011).

In parts of the region there are farmers using small acreages for agriculture. However, land prices for smaller properties are typically higher per acre than larger agricultural properties, reflecting the stronger rural residential real estate market. While there may be sufficient land available, the costs may be prohibitive to agricultural use.

It has been suggested that if new small lots with good agricultural capability were made available for agricultural use it could drive down prices and provide an opportunity to new farmers that cannot afford the current land prices and don't require large acreages. However, to achieve any notable land cost reduction the number of parcels created would need to be significant, and it can be expected that where land prices are higher because of demand for rural residential parcels, the majority of parcels would not be put to notable agricultural use. There is no mechanism for the Regional District to ensure the long-term agriculture use of such properties and prevent their conversion to strictly residential use.

2.1.9 Subdivision and Non-Farm Land Use Approvals

Policy direction regarding the RDBN Board's consideration of subdivision, and non-farm land use, in the ALR is contained in the Official Community Plans (OCP) for each Electoral Area. The following is the policy from the Vanderhoof Rural Official Community Plan, which is typical of the policy in other OCP's.

Severances for small lot residential (other than home site severances approved by the Agricultural Land Commission), institutional, commercial or industrial development shall be avoided. However, applications for exclusions, subdivisions, and non-farm uses within the Agricultural Land Reserve may be supported if:

- (g) *There is limited agricultural potential within the proposed area;*
- (h) *Soil conditions are not suitable for agriculture;*

- (i) *Neighbouring uses will not be compromised;*
- (j) *Adequate provisions for fencing are provided, where necessary;*
- (k) *There is a demonstrated need for the proposed development; and,*
- (l) *The application is in the best interest of the community.*

The following table provides the details regarding the applications for subdivision of land in the ALR from 2005 to 2011. Please note that the date from 2011 is incomplete as a number of applications are still in progress.

| ALR SUBDIVISION APPLICATIONS IN THE ALR BY YEAR (2005 – 2011) | | | | | |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------|--|---|
| | # of Applications | Supported by RDBN | Approved by ALC | Lots approved by Electoral Area | Lots denied by Electoral Area |
| 2005 | 10 | 7 | 5 | Area F = 4 Area A = 2 Area E = 1 | Area A = 2 Area E = 2 Area B = 1 |
| 2006 | 4 | 3 | 3 | Area F = 3 Area A = 2 | Area D = 1 |
| 2007 | 11 | 8 | 4 | Area B = 2 Area D = 1 Area E = 1 | Area A = 3 Area F = 2 Area B = 1 |
| 2008 | 12 | 9 | 10 | Area F = 6 Area A = 4 Area D = 1 | Area A = 1 Area D = 1 Area F = 1 |
| 2009 | 10 | 7 | 8 | Area A = 9 Area F = 3 Area D = 1 | Area F = 4 |
| 2010 | 14 | 11 | 12 | Area A = 8 Area D = 1 Area E = 5 | Area A = 30 Area E = 2 Area G = 2 Area F = 1 |
| 2011 | 4 | 3 | 2 (1 no decision) | Area A = 2 | Area F = 1 |

Table 5: ALR subdivision applications in the ALR by year (2005-2011)

An applicant may qualify for a home site severance if he or she has continuously owned and occupied the property as his or her principal place of residence since 21 December 1972. The following table provides the details regarding the applications for the creation of a parcel as a home site severance in the ALR from 2005 to 2011.

| ALR HOMESITE SEVERANCE APPLICATIONS BY YEAR (2005 – 2011) | | | | |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|
| | # of Applications | Supported by RDBN | Approved by ALC | Lots approved by Electoral Area |
| 2005 | 2 | 2 | 2 | Area F = 1, Area A = 1 |
| 2006 | 2 | 2 | 2 | Area F = 1, Area A = 1 |
| 2007 | 1 | 1 | 1 | Area F = 1 |
| 2008 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| 2009 | 1 | 1 | 1 | Area D = 1 |
| 2010 | 3 | 3 | 3 | Area A = 2, Area F = 1 |
| 2011 | 1 | 1 | No decision | |

Table 6: ALR homesite severance applications by year (2005-2011)

From 2005 to 2010 the ALR has approved the creation of an average of 8 new parcels of land in the ALR in the RDBN per year. Typically these parcels are in areas where the agricultural value of the land is limited, and similar sized parcels already exist. While considering applications to subdivide in the ALR the RDBN and the ALC give serious consideration to protecting the integrity of large parcels and protecting farm land from conflicts associated with residential development.

The amount of subdivision in the ALR is not considered excessive and is not having a significant impact of the viability of agriculture in the RDBN. However, it is recognized that the RDBN Board, and the ALC must continue to diligently guard against the fragmentation of agricultural lands, and the further encroachment of residential development into agricultural areas.

Non-Farm Use of ALR Land

In 2010 the RDBN undertook an inventory of areas suitable for industrial development in each Electoral Area of the RDBN. This study is useful to allow the RDBN and the ALC to evaluate the necessity for selective use of agricultural lands for industrial purposes.

While considering applications to use lands in the ALR for non-farm purposes the RDBN and the ALC give serious consideration to preserving that land for agricultural use. Policy direction regarding the RDBN Board's consideration non-farm land use in the ALR is contained in the Official Community Plans (OCP) for each Electoral Area. An example of typical policy is provided above.

The following table provides the details regarding the applications non-farm use of land in the ALR from 2005 to 2011.

| ALR NON-FARM USE APPLICATIONS BY YEAR (2005 – 2011) | | | | |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------|---|
| | # of Applications | Supported by RDBN | Approved by ALC | Hectares Approved for Non-Farm Use by Electoral Area |
| 2005 | 2 | 1 | 1 | Area A = barn for equip repair |
| 2006 | 1 | 1 | 1 | Area E = 43 Ha. for log storage |
| 2007 | 1 | 1 | 1 | Area B = 30 Ha. for pelletplant (expired) |
| 2008 | 1 | 1 | 1 | Area B = 1 Ha. for airport |
| 2009 | 2 | 2 | 2 | Area A = 2.5 Ha. for sawmill = 2.3 Ha. for school |
| 2010 | 1 | 1 | 1 | Area A = 8 Ha. for gravel pit |
| 2011 | 2 | 2 | 2 | Area A = 10.4 Ha. for expanded guest ranch operation = 28 m ² for pet crematorium |

Table 7: ALR non-farm use applications by year (2005-2011)

From 2005 to 2010 the ALR has approved the use of approximately 14 hectares of ALR land for non-farming purposes per year. Typically these parcels are in areas where the agricultural value of the land is limited; however, this is not always the case. There are areas where agricultural land is ideally suited for large scale industrial development. In limited circumstances, where other suitable lands are not available in the area, the RDBN, and the ACL, have supported the use of this land for industrial use.

Housing on ALR Land

The ALR sets a limit of one single family dwelling per parcel in the ALR. In addition, one secondary suite within the single family dwelling and one mobile home are also allowed, but only for use by the property owner's immediate family. If additional housing is needed for farm help the ALC does not restrict the number of additional dwellings.

Ultimately it is the responsibility of the ALC to implement its regulations unless that regulation specifically makes local government responsible. Section 18 (a) of the *Agricultural Land Commission Act* prohibits Local Governments from approving an additional residence unless it is necessary for farm use; however, the responsibility to determine if the residence is necessary for farm use remains with the ALC. The ALC has attempted to download responsibility for making this decision to local governments by policy that states that local government must be convinced that there is a justifiable need for an additional residence for farm help. However, this policy is no more than a statement of the role the ALC wants local government to play.

In 2009 the RDBN took the position that the RDBN will not consider requests to determine if an additional residence is necessary for farm use for the ALC, as this determination is the responsibility of the ALC, the ALC has the expertise and experience to evaluate such requests, and the Regional District is not legally able to charge a fee for the service.

The ALC has subsequently taken the position that property owners wanting an additional dwelling for that is necessary for farm use must make a non-farm use application for the dwelling, in order to have the ALC consider the issue.

The following table provides the details regarding the applications for second dwellings on a parcel of land in the ALR from 2005 to 2010. Please note that the 2009 applications are non-farm use applications.

| ALR ADDITIONAL DWELLING APPLICATIONS BY YEAR (2005 – 2011) | | | | |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------|---|
| | # of Applications | Supported by RDBN | Approved by ALC | Additional Dwellings Approved by Electoral Area |
| 2005 | 1 | 1 | 1 | Area A = 1 |
| 2006 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| 2007 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| 2008 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| 2009 | 2 | 1 | 1 | Area A = 1 |
| 2010 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| 2011 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |

Table 8: ALR additional dwelling applications by year (2005-2011)

ALR Inclusion and Exclusion Applications

From 2005 to 2010 the ALR has approved only 1 application to exclude land from the ALR. An exclusion application is not likely to be successful unless the land is of very limited agricultural value, and its exclusion would have very limited impact on any adjacent agricultural land.

Most inclusion applications involve Crown land that is being leased or sold for agricultural purposes. Inclusion of this land in the ALR is typically a condition of the lease or purchase. The amount of land in the RDBN included in the ALR varies greatly each year. From 2005 to 2010 the amount of land included in the ALR annually has varied from a low of 16 Ha to a high of 462 Ha.

The following table provides the details regarding applications for inclusion, and exclusion, of land from the ALR from 2005 to 2011.

| ALR EXCLUSION APPLICATIONS BY YEAR (2005 – 2011) | | | | |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------|---|
| | # of Applications | Supported by RDBN | Approved by ALC | Hectares Excluded by Electoral Area |
| 2005 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| 2006 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| 2007 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| 2008 | 2 | 1 | 1 | Area A = 27 Ha. for a 6 lot subdivision |
| 2009 | 1 | 0 | 0 | |
| 2010 | 2 | 0 | No decision | |
| 2011 | 1 | 0 | 0 | |

Table 9: ALR exclusion applications by year (2005-2011)

| ALR INCLUSION APPLICATIONS BY YEAR (2005 – 2011) | | | | |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---|
| | # of Applications | Supported by RDBN | Approved by ALC | Hectares Included by Electoral Area |
| 2005 | 6 | 6 | 6 | Area A = 65 Ha. Area C = 60 Ha. Area D = 50 Ha. Area F = 49 Ha. Area G = 32 Ha. |
| 2006 | 5 | 5 | 5 | Area A = 129 Ha. Area C = 157.5 Ha. Area E = 83 Ha. Area G = 93 Ha. |
| 2007 | 1 | 1 | 1 | Area D = 16 Ha. |
| 2008 | 2 | 2 | 1 | Area B = 66 Ha. Area F = 77 Ha. |
| 2009 | 3 | 3 | 3 | Area F = 98 Ha. Area G = 129 Ha. |
| 2010 | 1 | 1 | 1 | Area A = 20 Ha. |
| 2011 | 4 | 4 | 1 (3 no decision) | Area G = 64 Ha. |

Table 10: ALR inclusion applications by year (2005-2011)

2.1.10 Agricultural Land Use Inventory

A detailed inventory of agricultural land has proven to be a valuable planning tool in many local government jurisdictions where agricultural land use complexity exists, or where non-agricultural uses are competing with agricultural uses. An agricultural land use inventory (LUI) provides baseline data for future comparison, allowing local governments to monitor interface activities and track the status of local agricultural operations over time. The Provincial Ministry of Agriculture is encouraging local governments to undertake inventory projects and has developed a series of tools to assist local government staff. These tools include a database template, coding system and method of gathering information. Incorporating detailed information into a GIS database allows comprehensive data analysis and the ability to easily display resulting information.

Collecting detailed information to incorporate into a GIS, and updating that information over time, can be an extensive and laborious process. The method of data capture developed by the Ministry of Agriculture involves a team of two surveyors directly observing land use through a “windshield” survey and reconciling this information with aerial photographic interpretation. Significant investment is required into staff and resources for an inventory of this nature. A “windshield” survey is not practical for large expanses of agricultural land in rural and remote areas. The most effective application of an inventory within the RDBN may be to limit the scope to areas experiencing rural residential and other development pressure, such as the rural areas surrounding Smithers and Vanderhoof.

An LUI in select areas of the RDBN may provide a clearer picture of how agricultural land is being used and what types of agricultural operations exist. This information would be beneficial in the development of future policies and regulations. Further, it would potentially allow planners & decision makers to make more informed decisions regarding ALR and other land uses applications.

In addition to assisting in decision making, a LUI will provide baseline land use information that can be used to determine changes in the use of agricultural land over time. This will allow our future ability to understanding how the use of agricultural lands is changing over time.

Matched funding at the rate of 50% is available for LUIs from the Investment Agriculture Foundation Local Government Agricultural Planning Program, while the Provincial Government is willing to contribute in-kind, as well as provide database and GIS support services.

Given these benefits, and the existing support available from senior governments it is recommended that the RDBN consider undertaking a land use inventory in select agricultural areas experiencing development pressures.

2.2 Regulation Based Issues

2.2.1 Farm Classification and Taxes

Obtaining farm status is important for property tax purposes and is required for agricultural producers to obtain many benefits such as farm truck license plates, tax exemptions, marked fuel, and exemption from BC Hydro's two tier rate plan. It is also often linked to access to federal and provincial programs, such as the BC Environmental Farm Plan program. To obtain farm status an application must be made to BC Assessment and all or a portion of the land must be used for primary agricultural production, a farmer's dwelling, or the training and boarding of horses when operated in conjunction with horse rearing.

As a result of agricultural producers and supporters lobbying for a review of farm classification and assessment process the Province established the Farm Assessment Review Panel in February 2008. The Farm Assessment Review Panel conducted broad public consultations on the policies, procedures and statutory framework applied to the assessment of farm properties. The panel submitted their report to the Province on July 31, 2009, which included the split-classification amendment being implemented for the 2010 assessment roll.

For the 2010 assessment year the Province has eliminated the split classification of farm properties in the ALR that are not used for other purposes. Also eliminated is the split classification for the unused land of non-ALR properties where at least 50 per cent of the property is in or contributes to production or 25 per cent is in production and a minimum income threshold of \$10,000 is met. The farming community advocated for modifying the split-classification assessment system, as it had considerable impact on farmers' ability to make a living off the land. This change affects many of the approximately 8000 farms around the province that were previously split-classified. The split classification had the most significant impact on small holding agricultural products producers where residential assessments were high. Under the split-classification system, portions of farm properties in a residential class would be valued and taxed at the higher residential rate. In our region where farms struggle with profitability, split classification also significantly impacted farm operators. No changes were made for the 2010 assessment year with respect to the assessment of farmers' dwellings or other farm improvements.

Following is a summary of the farm assessment review panel recommendations with respect to the 2011 year (but which did not occur):

Recommendation 2.1 - Mandatory Submission

- Change the requirements for reporting farm income to BC Assessment to be the same as reported to the Canada Revenue Agency, and incorporate this requirement into the farm status application form.

Recommendation 2.2 - Harmonization of Reporting Periods

- Change the timing of income reporting to BC Assessment to coincide with the reporting period for income taxes.

Recommendation 2.3 - Harmonization of Definitions

- During the transition to the new regulations, have BC Assessment audit income reports with lower income ratios to ensure that the income is generated from approved Primary Agriculture Products. In addition, allow supplementary information from farmers where there is additional income from products that are not accepted by the Canada Revenue Agency.

Recommendation 2.4 - Review of PAP Schedule

- Review of the Primary Agriculture Products Schedule within three years to ensure that policy is being applied as intended and that some value-added products and activities are included.

Recommendation 4

- To qualify for farm status, establish a single income threshold at a minimum of \$3,500 for all farm properties and eliminate the higher threshold of \$10,000 for properties of less than 0.8 hectares. In addition, the thresholds should be reviewed every five years.
- Review and analyze the impact of using Canada Revenue Agency reporting data and the harmonization of Canada Revenue Agency and BC Assessment farming activities.

Recommendation 8

- Investigate a statutory provision that applies to ALR land only, to allow retired long-term farmers and their spouses, where the farm property continues to be farmed, to stay in the farm residence with continued farm status on the residence until that property is sold or there is a change in use.

Recommendation 9

- Exempt farm improvements at 87.5 percent of assessed value or \$50,000, whichever is greater.
- Since the recommended changes will result in less taxes being collected from farms, the Provincial Government should consider providing compensating local governments for a period of five years to allow for adjustment of budgets.

On November 14, 2011 Bill 8: Community, Sport and Cultural Development Statutes Amendment Act, 2011 received Royal Assent. This Bill adds to the *Assessment Act* definitions of “agricultural land reserve” and “spouse” and amends s. 23 of the *Assessment Act* to require the assessor, on application by an owner for a taxation year, to classify land as a farm if specific conditions are met. These conditions relate to classifying farm land for retired farmers and/or their spouse.

The Canada Revenue Agency has special tax measures available exclusively to farmers. These measures exist because it is accepted that if normal tax rules applied to the farm sector it would result in undue hardship. Many of these measures are long-standing and reflect the unique challenges faced by the agriculture industry and the larger social benefits associated with agriculture. Farming income, for income tax purposes, is money earned from the following

activities: soil tilling, raising and showing livestock, racehorse maintenance, raising poultry, dairy farming, fur farming, tree farming, fruit farming, beekeeping, operating a feedlot and other related activities. Most farm operations are unincorporated businesses or partnerships and are subject to personal income tax. People who farm as their primary source of income can deduct farm losses from their income, which is becoming an important feature of the tax system, as more and more farmers rely on non-farm incomes to make supplement their income. Currently there are no federal investment tax credits that are specific to the agriculture sector; however farmers may qualify for a credit under another category.

2.2.2 Animal Slaughter and Processing Regulations

As noted in Section 1 there are multiple regulations that apply to operators of a slaughter and processing facility. Jurisdictions that may be involved include local government, Northern Health, British Columbia Centre for Disease Control, Health Canada, Industry Canada, and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Achieving compliance is usually not difficult beyond the associated capital costs; however, figuring out what constitutes compliance can be challenging. Government extension services are required to help producers navigate their way through the regulations are not adequate, and farmers are challenged to wade through the complex set of regulations that exist.

The establishment of a level regulatory playing field is across the region is an issue. The results based nature of the regulation allows inspectors the flexibility to approve operational procedures and solutions that suit particular situations and circumstances; however, this dependence on the judgment and interpretation of the local inspectors can lead to inequities. It is important that inspectors continue to receive the training, support, and mentorship necessary to appropriately exercise their judgment.

Previously the District Agrologists working for the Ministry of Agriculture would play a role in helping agricultural producers and processors identify the applicable regulations, and would play a liaison role between inspectors and producers. This greatly facilitated compliance and was a great benefit to producers and processors unfamiliar with bureaucracy and regulation. Unfortunately the RDBN is now served by a single District Agrologist working out of Prince George, who is responsible for a very large region. The District Agrologist is no longer able to play such a hands-on role helping agricultural producers and processors.

2.2.3 Employee Housing

Accommodating the apparent demand for on-farm housing of agricultural workers may be of benefit to a select few farm operators. The nature of agricultural labour often requires labourers to work odd-hours and split-shifts, or work for longer than 'regular' working hours, making living on the farm more convenient for both the farm owner and labourers. Often, seasonal migrant labour is used on farms through Federal Government sponsored programs such as the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program. At times housing for such workers may be appropriate.

However, it is a challenge to accommodate this legitimate need in a manner that does not pose a greater long-term risk to agriculture.

The greatest risk to agriculture posed by farm worker housing is the potential for non-agricultural use of additional dwellings that are originally intended to accommodate farm employees. The subsequent problematic issues that arise from this include the following.

- Increases in non-farming populations within the ALR, potentially creating conflict and nuisance complaints.
- Large house and residential area footprints taking farmland out of production.
- Expectations of future subdivision within the ALR to allow the sale of a surplus house or to allow a family member to obtain a mortgage for the house.
- Increases in land value due to an increased number of dwellings, making farmland unaffordable for new farmers.

Of key concern surrounding these issues are the determination of the necessity of additional dwellings, and the provision of certainty that the residence will only be used for farm purposes.

The Agricultural Land Reserve Use, Subdivision and Procedure Regulation sets a limit of one single family dwelling per parcel for properties in the ALR. In addition, one secondary suite within the single family dwelling and one mobile home are also allowed, but only for use by the property owner's immediate family. However, Section 18 (a) of the *Agricultural Land Commission Act, 2002* prohibits local governments from issuing building permits for additional residences unless that dwelling is necessary for farm use:

18. Unless permitted by this Act, the regulations or the terms imposed in an order of the commission,

(a) a local government, a first nation government or an authority, or a board or other agency established by a local government, a first nation government or an authority, or a person or agency that enters into an agreement under the Local Services Act may not

(i) permit non-farm use of agricultural land or permit a building to be erected on the land except for farm use, or

(ii) approve more than one residence on a parcel of land unless the additional residences are necessary for farm use, and

The ALC provides local governments with the ability to approve additional dwellings for farm use in order to allow a more expedient process. This can be important given the seasonality of agriculture. Unfortunately, the ALC will not provide assistance to local governments in determining whether the additional residence is actually necessary to the farm operation outside of the normal non-farm use application process. There is no limit set on additional residences if they are deemed to be necessary for farm use. Further to this, there are no guidelines provided as to what constitutes necessary. RDBN staff and Board are not, in the RDBN's opinion, the appropriate body to be interpreting provincial legislation, and are not appropriately qualified to determine the necessity of housing for farm use.

In addition to the difficulty of ascertaining whether an additional dwelling is necessary for farm use, there is no authority under the *Local Government Act* to do so. Further, there are no provisions to charge a fee for this process under the *Land Commission Act*, as such a fee cannot be charged to cover the time and other costs associated with the request. Therefore it is felt that the ALC should accept their role as the most appropriate body to determine if additional residences are necessary for farm use. If the primary goal of local government participation in these requests is expediency, the ALC should devise a shorter application process.

As a result of the difficulty of ascertaining whether an additional dwelling is necessary for farm use and the infrequency of applications, the Regional District Board has adopted the following policy:

“...staff to no longer consider requests to determine if an additional residence on a parcel of land in the Agricultural Land Reserve is needed for farm use. Further, that requests for a second dwelling necessary for farming be considered as non-farm use applications through the Agricultural Land Commission.”

Since 2005, the RDBN has received three applications for additional dwellings in the ALR. All of these applications were forwarded to the ALC for consideration, with two being approved (both of which were recommended for approval by the Regional District Board). The third application was recommended for denial by the board, and subsequently denied by the Commission.

Due to the current lack of demand for farm-worker housing in the RDBN, changes to this policy are not currently being considered. At such a time where this might become necessary, there are sufficient guidelines for consideration contained in the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands 2009 publication titled “Regulating Temporary Farm Worker Housing In the ALR: Discussion Paper and Standards”, as well as the 2001 Discussion Paper titled “Determining the Need for Additional Dwellings for Farm Employees”. BC Agricultural Council also provides provisions for housing farm workers and what is suitable for temporary housing.

Some agricultural producers within the region participate in the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) program in order to obtain affordable farm workers. WWOOF is a global network of organizations that partner volunteers with organic farmers in order to promote the exchange of culture and education about sustainable organic practices. The volunteers work without compensation and the host farm provides the volunteers with food and accommodation. WWOOF has been operating in Canada since 1985 and now has over 900 farms participating in the program. According to the WWOOF website, there are currently 7 farms in the region accepting WWOOF volunteers.

2.2.4 Disease and Waste Management

The disease of most concern in the region is bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), commonly known as mad cow disease. This disease may be spread when cattle consume feed

products contaminated with proteins from infected animals. In infected cattle, BSE concentrates in certain tissues including the skull, brain and attached nerves, eyes, tonsils, spinal cord and attached nerves, and a portion of the small intestine, which are known collectively as specified risk material (SRM). Since BSE is transferrable to humans through consumption of infected SRM, it presents a serious public health issue. As a result, SRM is removed from all cattle slaughtered for human consumption and must be disposed of at an approved facility.

Processors in the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako are fortunate in that they have free access to waste disposal of carcasses, including SRM at RDBN waste disposal sites. This is a significant cost advantage compared to processors in other regions. In 2008, it is estimated that about 300 tonnes of slaughterhouse waste including SRM waste was landfilled in the region.

In British Columbia, agricultural waste is governed by the Agricultural Waste Control Regulation. It provides for the storage and/or composting of agricultural waste on farms where it is generated, and prescribes the use of waste materials for land application under certain circumstances.

The BC SRM Management Program ran from April 2007 to March 2010 to help BC slaughter facilities comply with CFIA SRM regulations. Both of the inspected slaughter facilities in the region received funding through this program. The Country Locker in Vanderhoof received \$59,936 to construct additional SRM & non-SRM cold storage to facilitate the disposal schedule of the local landfill. While still under construction, the Northwest Premium Meat Co-op in Telkwa received \$58,843 to build a waste storage room for the separation of SRM from non-SRM waste. Funding was also provided to purchase bins and equipment for waste handling and to purchase a trailer for storage of SRM waste.

The provincial *Animal Disease Control Act*, administered by the Provincial Veterinarian, provides a statutory authority to limit the spread of contagious diseases in animals. It allows for the control of animals infected or thought to be infected and establishes criteria for preventing health risks. Animal diseases that can cause human illness or have international trade implications, such as avian influenza, are considered to be a 'foreign animal disease' and fall under federal authority and responsibility.

2.2.5 ICBC Farm Vehicle Use Restrictions

The Insurance Corporation of British Columbia (ICBC) issues "farm truck" licenses for commercial vehicles used by farmers in connection with their agricultural operations. To qualify for a farm truck license, a person must own or lease property that is classified as a farm by BC Assessment. Licensing and insurance costs are less for farm trucks than for other commercial vehicles because farm trucks tend to spend less time on the road. A vehicle with a farm truck licence plate may also be used for pleasure or for driving to or from work or school, but may not be used for any business that does not relate to a farm.

ICBC uses the BC Assessment definition of farm use consisting of primary agricultural production. This means that the transportation of processed (secondary) agricultural products

that are produced by the farm cannot be legally transported by a farm licensed vehicle. For example, a farmer can transport a cow from his farm to the slaughterhouse in a farm truck, but cannot transport the processed meat back from the slaughterhouse to the farm in the farm truck. Similar restrictions apply for farmers when transporting goods to sell at local farmers' markets.

A vehicle owned and insured for primary purpose of transporting or delivering processed products would have a higher license fee and insurance premium as a result of increased risk due to the delivery use. If this use were to be included in farm vehicle registration, insurance costs and license fees for farm vehicles would increase. Since not all farm vehicles are used for transporting processed farm products, many farmers would not benefit from the inclusion. For individuals that utilize their farm plate to transport processed products on a minimal basis, a Temporary Change Endorsement (APV40) is available on a per diem/monthly basis for a period of up to three months.

This regulation is prohibitive, and creates a frustrating problem for small scale farmers. Consideration should be given to amending the regulation or creating a new regulation to allow small-scale farmers the ability to transport processed farm goods in a farm truck without purchasing a temporary endorsement.

2.3 Development and Resource Issues

2.3.1 Succession and Recruitment

To ensure local food security, farmland, and farming skills need to be passed to succeeding generations of farmers. Farm succession is a process that involves the transition of knowledge, skills, labour, management and ownership of the agricultural production operations between existing farmers to successors. In the agriculture industry, training of new farmers by experienced and knowledgeable farmers is vitally important. This education and training by local farmers is important because of the limited formal education opportunities in the region.

Given the current low profit levels associated with the production of agricultural products over the past few years in the region, the industry is seeing fewer new entrants and an aging workforce. A continuation of this trend may result in a significant loss of agricultural production capacity in the future. Farm succession is a critical component of food security and sustainable agriculture.

Succession planning initiatives and supporting activities to assist retiring and attract new farmers may be necessary in the future to ensure lands continue to be farmed. There is a need for the province to initiate government extension programs in cooperation with agencies such as the BC Ministry of Agriculture, the federal Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and Farm Credit Canada, the BC Agriculture Council, the BC AgriTourism Alliance, the BC Cattlemen's Association, the BC Food Processors Association and other agricultural groups and associations.

Non-traditional forms of agriculture may be a way to attract new entrants. Community supported agriculture and farming cooperatives provide opportunities for people with limited experience or background in agriculture to learn from established farmers. Organizations such as The Community Farms Program, a joint venture between FarmFolk/CityFolk Society and The Land Conservancy of BC (TLC), and Ontario's FarmStart organization provide models of successful alternatives to traditional agriculture. These types of organizations bring together landowners, farmers, local communities, and resources to develop and support community farm models. In addition, they can facilitate, support and encourage a new generation of farmers to develop economically viable, locally based, and ecological agricultural enterprises.

Small lot agriculture may also present an opportunity for new entrants to the agriculture industry. While small lot agriculture in this region may not be able to provide a full-time income, it can be a stepping stone to a larger endeavor. In addition, support from the local real estate community identifying properties well suited for agriculture would help new entrants. A real estate inventory of farm land for sale, supported with information packages about local agricultural opportunities and resources may be a valuable tool.

The ultimate solution to succession and recruitment is a strong and profitable agriculture sector. However, in the interim, it is important that traditional farm knowledge be preserved. The

challenge is identifying how to facilitate the sharing of information between knowledgeable and new farmers. The Community futures development corporation web page may serve as a resource to connect farmers through the development of a farm succession and/or farm mentoring directory. However, it is noted that farming organization will need to become involved in the promotion and organization of any successful efforts.

2.3.2 4-H Clubs

4-H is an international non-profit organization dedicated to young people and youth development. Although historically and functionally the organization is agriculturally focused, the purpose of the 4-H program is to prepare youth for their future as adult citizens through developing community awareness, leadership abilities, citizenship, and personal development. 4-H stands for head, heart, hands and health.

4-H clubs in Canada are sponsored by both government and private sector organizations. Government sponsors in Canada are Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Heritage Canada, and Farm Credit Canada. The Ministry of Agriculture also sponsors the British Columbia 4-H division – in 2010 \$87,000 was given to BC 4-H clubs from this source alone.

This important organization has faced challenges in recent years. Membership numbers in BC have decreased by 22% in the last 8 years. The economic downturn in 2008 resulted in some financial losses for the organization and staff lay-offs. Statistics show that less than 1 out of every 10 members follows a career in agriculture; the 4-H program therefore designs its projects to prepare youth for their future as adult citizens of any community, not just rural or farm communities. However, the agricultural knowledge passed on to the next generation is important to the future of farming. The table below shows total BC membership from 2002 – 2010.

Table 11: BC 4-H Total Members by Year

| BC 4-H Total Members by Year* | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2010 | 2011 |
| 3,237 | 3,105 | 2,946 | 2,712 | 2,923 | 2,712 | 2,492 | 2,207 | 2,163 |

*Statistics taken from <http://www.bc4h.bc.ca/>. Membership for 2009 not available.

4-H Clubs in BC are active in educating and broadening youth's perspectives on agriculture. The RDBN falls within the provincial 4-H region called "Yellowhead West", which includes the Vanderhoof, Lakes, and Bulkley Valley Districts. Each District has multiple individual Clubs and Projects. Projects involve numerous activities for members that are directly related to or involving the project name and provide numerous learning opportunities and challenges for youth members. 4-H projects in the region include, for example, beef, horse, sheep, dairy, photography, swine, rabbit, horse, and dogs, amongst others.

Other Province-wide projects open to 4-H members in the region include workshops such as preserving agricultural land and increase public awareness, agriculture demonstrations, public speaking events, leadership skill building, and informative career information sessions.

4-H is integral to the succession and development of agriculture in youth. The organization's success is dependent upon support from the 4-H community, members, leaders, volunteers, as well as financial commitment and partnerships from private sector and government sponsors.

2.3.3 Research and Training

A farm is a business and it is becoming increasingly important to be able to maximize every advantage that can be gained from an understanding of marketing, accounting, and business administration. Locally available business planning, education, and training programs are going to become increasingly important factors in any strategy to improve the capacity, competitiveness, and profitability of agriculture in the region.

Research into new crops and livestock types, cultivation and production methods, marketing, farm business administration, etc., is needed to diversify and strengthen the agricultural economy in the region. Knowledge of existing farm practices need to be preserved, documented, and made available to future farmers. Research and knowledge retention needs to be accompanied by the capacity to train existing and future farmers, and their employees, in order that the knowledge can be put to use. Currently there are very limited formal education and training opportunities available in the region.

The Community Futures Development Corporation plays a valuable role in mentoring, training, and capacity building from a business perspective. An increased focus on these types of services to farmers would be of great value, and is encouraged.

At UNBC Dr. David Connell of the School of Environmental Planning has initiated the 'Good Food' Value Chain research program. This program seeks to involve BC communities to assist them in building the capacity of local food systems from field to plate. This includes producers, marketing agencies, input industries, processors, retailers, farmers' markets, and consumers. The program focuses on improving markets for local foods, raising awareness about local food systems and making local food available to all residents. This initiative needs to be encouraged and supported.

The creation of production guides specifically for northern BC would be a valuable asset to farmers in the region. Currently many farmers rely on production guides from other provinces such as Alberta or Saskatchewan, which may be unsuitable for local soils and climate. This is a project that a District Agrologist could undertake, if the positions were replaced in the region.

2.3.4 Beef Production

Beef Slaughter and Processing Capacity

In the RDBN there is one Class A facility (slaughter + processing) in Vanderhoof, and one Class B facility (slaughter only) in Telkwa. There is also a Class C Facility in the Grassy Plains area on

the south side of Francois Lake. Almost all areas of the RDBN are within 2 hours drive of the Class A or B facility.

The one area that is not within a 2 hour drive is the area on the south side of Francois Lake, commonly known as the Southside. This area is accessed by ferry from Highway 37 south of Burns Lake, or a long drive on logging roads. Class C facilities are being phased out given the new BC Meat Inspection Regulations (BCMIR).

Most producers want their livestock slaughtered in the fall, for a number of reasons. Slaughter facilities run at full capacity from late August until Christmas, leading to delays in slaughter for some farmers. It could be argued that there is a lack of capacity during this peak period; however, between January and July there is an abundance of un-used capacity. Some producers are attempting to take advantage of the slaughter facility's scheduling flexibility during slower months.

Processing (meat cutting, wrapping, curing, sausage-making) faces the same seasonality as abattoirs. For them, this is amplified because hunting season means that at the time that domestic producers want to process their meat, hunters also want game processing. During the fall, the year-round, health dept. licensed cut-and-wrap (C&W) facilities are swamped. Seasonal, often unlicensed, processors make up the difference.

Cooler capacity is a limitation to slaughter capacity, as in most cases, carcasses need to be fully cooled on site prior to shipping. This requires up to 48 hours for large carcasses, although there may be some flexibility from government regulators on this point. Carcasses take up a lot of cooler space, and cooler space is expensive to build and maintain.

Because so much of the meat processing industry is seasonal, it becomes difficult to recruit, train and retain skilled staff. Slaughtering is a specialized and dying skill. Also, meat-cutting is increasingly becoming a rare skill. When beef prices are low, producers may extensively market their products locally. When beef prices are high, many of these producers will opt to ship animals live to Alberta instead, thus depriving local processors.

The high capital costs, complex regulatory environment, and other issues discussed in this document make it challenging to start and maintain a processing operation. There is currently a need to increase the regional knowledge base with respect to food processing. This requires a trained resource person who can work with existing and potential new processors on things such as waste disposal, food safety plans, equipment procurement, choosing appropriate finishing materials, packaging, labeling, and permitting. This is a role that could be played by a District Agrologist.

Producers intending to ship meat outside of BC must have their animals slaughtered at a federally licensed abattoir. Currently, there are no federally licensed beef abattoirs in BC. This creates financial challenges for local producers to access national and international markets with value-added meat products, as transportation may become cost-prohibitive. In addition, it potentially results in a poorer-quality product, as the animals become stressed from long-distance travel.

There are significant concerns about the upcoming changes to the BC abattoir inspection system. Currently the province of BC contracts federal (Canadian Food Inspection Agency or CFIA) meat inspectors to provide inspection services to provincially licensed facilities. The CFIA will be withdrawing meat inspection services from provincially licensed abattoirs in 2014 and meat inspection services will be taken over by the provincial government. The structure and regulatory framework of the new provincial system will significantly impact the agriculture industry within the region.

Currently the provincial government pays the cost of meat inspection services in provincially licensed facilities and is committed to do so until the end of 2012. The province is investigating whether to continue paying for these services or if the costs will be passed on to the industry. If local abattoirs are required to pay for meat inspection services it will place an enormous burden upon the region's already struggling agriculture sector.

Class E Facilities

Class E facilities are only available where slaughter capacity is unavailable within a 2 hour drive from the farm. There is limited ability for producers of poultry and beef to obtain a Class E license, except perhaps on the south side of Francois Lake. However, a Class E license may potentially be approved for the slaughter of specialty products that cannot be processed at existing facilities.

In Class E facilities, only a small number on animals can be slaughtered, and the products are restricted to farm-gate sales. These restrictions preclude an E-license from accommodating and notable increase in regional production.

2.3.5 Poultry and Rabbit Production

Poultry and Rabbit Slaughter Capacity

In BC a producer may now produce up to 2000 chickens per year under permit from the BC Chicken Marketing Board. This may be an opportunity for small growers to supply a large amount of our local market, without having to purchase expensive quota. Poultry raising has traditionally been a spring to fall activity, and most poultry production ceases through winter, as it would require heated barns.

There is currently one Class A poultry/rabbit facility operating in Vanderhoof that slaughters and processes their own animals as well as providing custom slaughter. There is currently one Class C poultry processing facility in the region, which is located outside of Vanderhoof. However, as noted, Class C licenses are being phased out given the new BC Meat Inspection Regulations (BCMIR).

There is increasing concern that in the short term, there will not be adequate inspected poultry slaughter capacity in our region. The recent loss of a centrally located mobile slaughter facility

will exacerbate this shortage in 2012. However, the provincial licensing authority is now allowing combination red-meat and poultry establishments to operate under one license, which may provide greater financial viability for small regional abattoirs.

2.3.6 Other Meat Production

Pork

Due to an oversupplied pork market, decreased pork consumption and the resulting low hog prices, in May of 2009 the federal government launched the Cull Breeding Swine Program (CBSP) to help hog producers regain their competitive advantage. This would be accomplished by reducing the size of Canada's total breeding stock, enabling some hog producers to downsize, and assisting hog producers to address the current market situation.

After the CBSP expired, continued lobbying by the Canadian Pork Council for additional financial assistance resulted in the launch of the Hog Industry Loan Loss Reserve Program and the Hog Farm Transition Program. The Hog Farm Transition Program is a \$75 million initiative designed to help eligible producers by providing payments to those who agree to set aside all hog production in their enterprise for a minimum of three years.

Because large producers had extensive capital tied up in their operations, they did not take advantage of the program as much as small, traditional producers, which characterize this region. This has resulted in a limited supply of pork in the region. In BC there are twenty eight family farms that raise pigs on a commercial level, producing only about 10% of the pork consumed in the province. Additionally, in BC there is one federally licensed swine slaughter and processing facility located Langley. Local producers have indicated that the local pork market is underserved and therefore there may be potential for an expansion of this industry in our region.

Lamb

Lamb is becoming a popular product, but lamb processing is more expensive compared to beef, as similar work yields much less product. That being said, lamb production is becoming popular in the region. Most lamb producers market their products directly to consumers. In areas good access to a slaughter facility there is potential for increased production.

Lamb prices have been rising throughout North America and opportunities exist to grow markets at all scales. Changing demographics in BC, especially of the religious and cultural preferences of many new Canadians affects the demand for locally produced lamb. Lamb production challenges include issues of seasonal supply and a lack of steady distribution system in the marketplace.

Goat

Chevon (goat meat) is the most widely eaten red meat worldwide. In Canada the demand for chevon is growing due to increasing cultural diversity and awareness of its healthy nature. Goat production presents diverse opportunities such as milk and fibre (wool) production. There are farmers raising goats within the region, with some producing secondary agricultural products such as goat milk soap.

Bison

Currently there is one farm in the region producing federally inspected bison meat. The meat from Bison is very lean and high in nutrients, especially essential fatty acids and iron. In BC bison are considered wildlife and are regulated by the Ministry of Environment and administered by the Ministry of Agriculture. The rearing of fallow deer, bison and reindeer is regulated under the *Game Farm Act*, and producers must obtain a Game Farm Permit issued by the Ministry of Agriculture.

The BC bison industry is relatively small with approximately 53 licensed ranches and 7250 head of bison. The industry has experienced a significant drop in numbers in recent years because of low prices and the effect of the BC Meat Inspection Regulation. A recent surge in prices for both feeders and finished animals may present an opportunity for growth in this industry.

2.3.7 Dairy Farming

Dairy farming in the region remains a significant part of the agricultural economy. Dairies in BC are regulated under the *Milk Industry Act*, which governs production, storage, transportation, processing and sale of milk and milk byproducts. Milk producers are highly regulated and facilities are regularly inspected to ensure safe and clean milk production and handling.

There are 13 operating dairy farms in the RDBN; 11 in the Bulkley Valley and 2 in the Nechako Valley totaling approximately 1000 milking cows. Dairying historically has been a significant industry in RDBN because it used to provide all of the milk consumed west of Prince George. However, in 2001 the only remaining milk processing plant in Northern BC closed and the dairy farms in the RDBN began to ship their milk to the BC Lower Mainland and Alberta. Today, the dairy industry in the RDBN is part of a provincially regulated supply managed dairy quota system. This means that currently the dairy farms of the RDBN ship close to 30,000 litres of milk per day for processing and sale in Western Canada.

Dairy farms have the highest gross and net farm cash receipts out of all the agricultural industries in BC, which means that dairy farms are one of the greatest economic contributors to agriculture in the RDBN. The challenges that face the regional dairy industry are similar to the dairymen in the rest of BC. Expansion of existing dairy farms is difficult due to high milk quota prices and high capital investment costs for new dairy facilities. Regional dairy farms must also maintain their position within the provincial marketing system to ensure their milk will be processed.

2.3.8 Fruit and Vegetable Farming

There are four separate industries that relate to fruit and vegetable farming: field vegetable production, greenhouse vegetable production, fruit tree farming, and berry production. The vast majority of the commercial production of fruits and vegetables occurs in the Lower Mainland, Vancouver Island and the southern Interior. There is small amount of producers in northern regions, mainly of field vegetable production.

As identified in the 2009 “Trees to Tractors” report, the grocery retailer Overwaitea will consider buying local produce if the producer can meet the demand, and that they can meet or beat the current price Overwaitea pays for that product. This is done at discretion of the local store manager provided it meets the requirements of the buying and approval process. However it is unlikely that much local produce is saleable in local grocery stores, simply because of the difficulties in meeting their standards and required volumes. In addition, local producers must be price competitive with imported fruits and vegetables from the US or Mexico, where growing seasons are considerably longer and farm labour is much less expensive. These conditions lead to slim profit margins for local producers. There may be some potential for local grocery store retail of carrots, potatoes, turnips and onions as these vegetables can be kept in longer cold storage and shipped as required.

Field Vegetable Production

All regulated field vegetable crops produced north of the 53rd parallel (Quesnel) are exempted from registering with the BC Vegetable Marketing Commission (BCVMC), unless production exceeds one ton of individual vegetables. In this case a producer may apply to the Commission for an exemption from marketing through a designated agency, which are regularly provided in isolated areas if there will be no impact on the orderly marketing of the regulated product. By operating outside the regulation of the BCVMC producers are responsible for finding and servicing their own markets. One exception to this regulation is organically grown potatoes, which are subject to the BCVMC’s marketing regulations.

Most field vegetables are highly perishable and are produced for the fresh market. Some field vegetables commonly grown in the region, such as potatoes, carrots, turnips and onions, can be kept in longer cold storage. While the field vegetable industry is facing some challenges, there may be opportunities for local producers to displace imported vegetables. Additional opportunities may exist in small scale vegetable processing of specialty food products for niche markets.

Greenhouse Vegetable Production

The BC greenhouse vegetable industry is globally competitive and utilizes leading edge technology to maximize yields, quality and efficiency. The most commonly grown crops include tomato, sweet bell peppers, long English cucumbers and butter lettuce. The production of these products is regulated under the *Natural Products Marketing (BC) Act*, administered by the BCVMC. A structured marketing system allows growers to focus on growing rather than marketing and enables crop specialization.

The greenhouse vegetable industry is very capital intensive and the large capital investment involved in start-up presents a barrier to entry for many potential growers. Once operational, the main costs include: labour (25%), heating (28%) and marketing (25%). Heating costs in this region can be expected to represent a larger share of the costs compared to warmer climates.

Fruit Tree Farming

Fruit trees can be challenging to grow in colder climates, however there are varieties available that are suitable for cooler, shorter-season areas. Fruit trees cannot be commercially grown in our region due to climate constraints. On a small scale, some tree fruits such as hardy varieties of pear, cherry, apricot, plum, apple and crab apple can supply local farmers' markets. Regionally grown tree fruits are also suitable for value-added products such as preserves, jams and jellies.

Berry Production

Blueberries, cranberries, raspberries and strawberries are the most prevalent commercial berry crop in BC. Although most berries require a mild climate, strawberries and raspberries can be grown almost anywhere in the province. Wild berries, especially huckleberries and Saskatoon berries are abundant throughout the region. The short shelf life and delicate nature of berries combined with long distances to markets make commercial berry growing impractical in our region. Regionally grown berries are most suitable for value added products such as jellies, jams and syrups.

2.3.9 Bedding Plant Production

The production of bedding plants is part of the floriculture industry, which is one of the most successful horticulture sectors. In northern BC the bedding plant production is technology and capital intensive because of the use of greenhouses for most plant types. The producers in the region are mostly smaller growers that grow bedding plants on a seasonal basis and only operate a few months of the year. There is one large-scale greenhouse complex near Telkwa, which specializes in the production of tree seedlings for afforestation, reforestation and landscaping.

2.3.10 Agritourism and Agroforestry

Agroforestry is the combined land use of agriculture and forestry. Both agricultural products and forestry products are produced concurrently on the same parcel of land. There are various forms of agroforestry including in-forest farming and 'silvopasture'. In-forest farming is where high-value specialty products such as mushrooms, nuts, herbs or floral greenery are cultivated under the protection of a forest canopy modified to provide the correct growing conditions. Silvopasture is where cattle or sheep graze in a forest environment, which is managed to produce not only grass for livestock but also trees for wood products.

Agroforestry can be incorporated into existing agricultural operations by introducing trees along grazed riparian zones or on rangelands. This provides farmers with economic diversification, sequesters carbon and provides other environmental benefits. When implemented in an ecologically-based manner, agroforestry can contribute to ecosystem diversity, long-term sustainability and overall environmental quality.

Agritourism involves any agriculturally-based activity that draws visitors to a farm. It can include a variety of activities, from the viewing of growing, harvesting and processing of locally grown foods to u-pick activities, mazes, petting zoos, and trail or hay rides. Within the ALR agritourism activities are designated as farm use for land that is assessed as a farm, if the use is temporary and seasonal, and promotes or markets farm products grown, raised or processed on the farm. Accommodation for agritourism is permitted within the ALR provided the land is assessed as a farm. The accommodation is limited to 10 sleeping units in total of seasonal campsites, seasonal cabins or short term use of bedrooms, and the total developed area for buildings, landscaping and access for the accommodation must be less than 5% of the parcel area.

2.3.11 Infrastructure and Utility Issues

Single Phase Power

The regulation of electrical power in BC is administered by the BC Utilities Commission, an independent regulatory agency of the Provincial Government, under the *Utilities Commission Act*. The Commission's primary responsibility is the regulation of energy utilities under its jurisdiction to ensure that rates charged for energy are fair, just and reasonable, and that utilities provide safe, adequate and secure service to their customers.

Single Phase power distribution is widely used, especially in rural areas, where the cost of a three phase distribution network is high. Single phase power is the type of power used to service residences and those businesses not requiring three phase power. This service is generally described as 120 volt AC service.

Agricultural producers rely on an efficient energy production system to supply power for numerous activities including irrigation, harvesting, and feeding and watering cattle. It is critical that rates remain reasonable to farmers in order to remain competitive in the industry and ensure a sustainable future for food production. Farm energy programs provide important incentives to both the agricultural industry and the production of electricity.

All residential customers pay the BC Hydro conservation rate. As of April 1, 2010, power consumption is billed at 6.27 cents per kilowatt-hour (kWh) for the first 1,350 kWh used over a two-month billing period. Above that amount, customers pay 8.78 cents per kWh for the balance of the electricity used during the billing period. This rate structure is designed to encourage conservation and is referred to as a "stepped rate". The first portion is called Step 1 and the amount above that is called Step 2.

Agricultural operations designated by BC Assessment as having “farm status” are exempt from the conservation rate and only pay the Step 1 rate for all power used. Agricultural customers will automatically have their bill adjusted by BC Hydro if their farm status is maintained or changed. The BC Hydro farm rate is not advertised and must be applied for.

Three Phase Power

Three phase power is the common distribution level for power in BC and is also used to power large motors and other large loads (primarily industrial operations) of customers needing a large connected load of 5,000 kW or more. Access to three phase power can provide an agricultural producer with significant opportunities by allowing the use of larger commercial/industrial equipment. In this region, access to three phase power is limited. The primary issues identified by industry as barriers to accessing transmission level power relate to the timeline and cost of connections.

According to BC Hydro’s transmission interconnection process guidelines, connection timelines can vary from 17 months to 4.5 years depending on the required infrastructure upgrades. Costs for transmission connection are impacted by such factors as distance from the transmission line and required system reinforcements. These factors can vary drastically from property to property and community to community. BC Hydro has a long standing principle that customer should pay for the cost of their service connection. Based on this information, BC Hydro’s current connection process has the ability to create a competitive advantage of one property or community over another.

The lack of availability of three-phase power can be a limiting factor for agricultural operations requiring heavy machinery or equipment. This includes equipment required for cold storage and processing facilities.

Natural Gas

Natural gas prices directly and indirectly affect agricultural operations in BC. The direct use of natural gas by agriculture is mostly within the greenhouse sector; however natural gas prices have a significant indirect effect on agriculture because of its importance in the manufacture of nitrogen based fertilizer. For nitrogen based fertilizer, natural gas contributes 75% to 90% of the cost of production. Phosphate and potash fertilizers use much less natural gas, which contribute 15% to 30% of their production costs. Similarly, but to a smaller extent, natural gas is a significant cost component in the production of both phosphate (15% to 30% of production costs) and potash (15%) fertilizers. High natural gas prices contributed to a substantial 23% reduction in U.S. nitrogen fertilizer production capacity from 1998 through 2003.

Fortis BC (who recently bought-out Terasen Gas) is spearheading an initiative geared towards assisting farmers to reduce their use of natural gas. The BC Farm Energy Assessment Pilot Project will conduct energy assessments on 25 BC farms in the spring and summer of 2010. The aim of the assessments is to gain a clear understanding of how farms use energy. The only results of this program published so far pertain to vegetable and floriculture greenhouses,

which are heavy users of natural gas. In this region access to natural gas as a direct energy source is limited in rural areas.

Gasoline and Diesel Fuel Costs

Rising gas and diesel prices have significantly and directly reduced profits in the agriculture sector. Overall, diesel is the main energy type used in the Canadian agricultural sector, followed by gasoline. Farm machinery is the main energy usage type in all provinces in Canada. The cattle industry is also the main consumer of energy in British Columbia.

Energy used for other agricultural activities is a significant part of the whole energy use of the province. Diesel and gasoline make up 66% of total energy use in British Columbia agriculture, with natural gas (22%) a significant energy type used.

Figure 40: BC Agricultural Energy Consumption by Energy Type in 1997

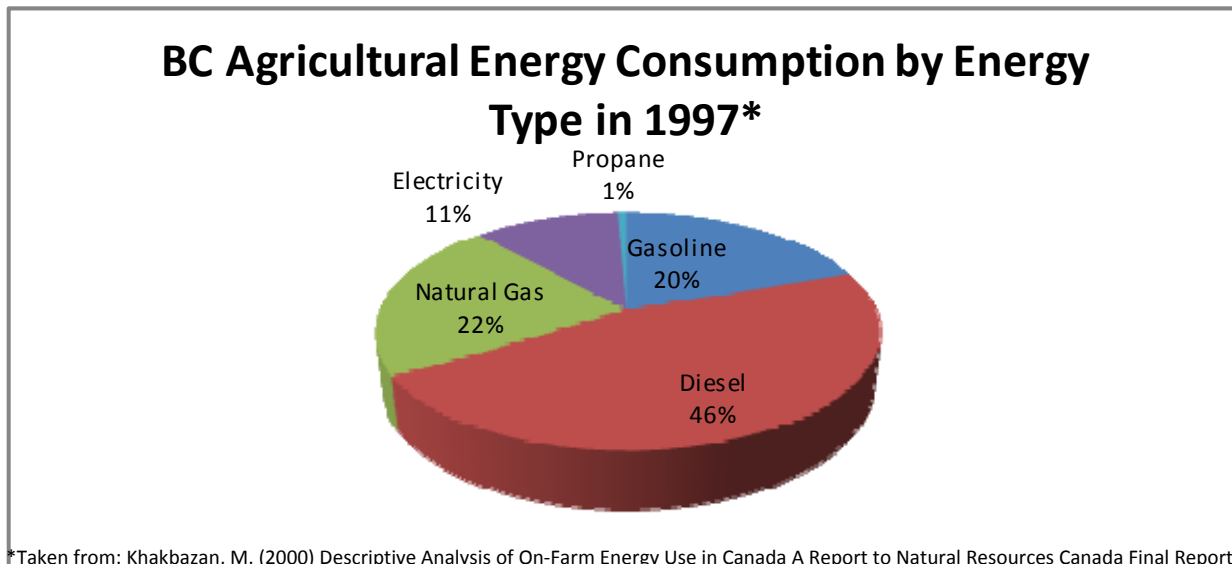


Figure 41: BC Agricultural Energy Consumption by Usage Type in 1997

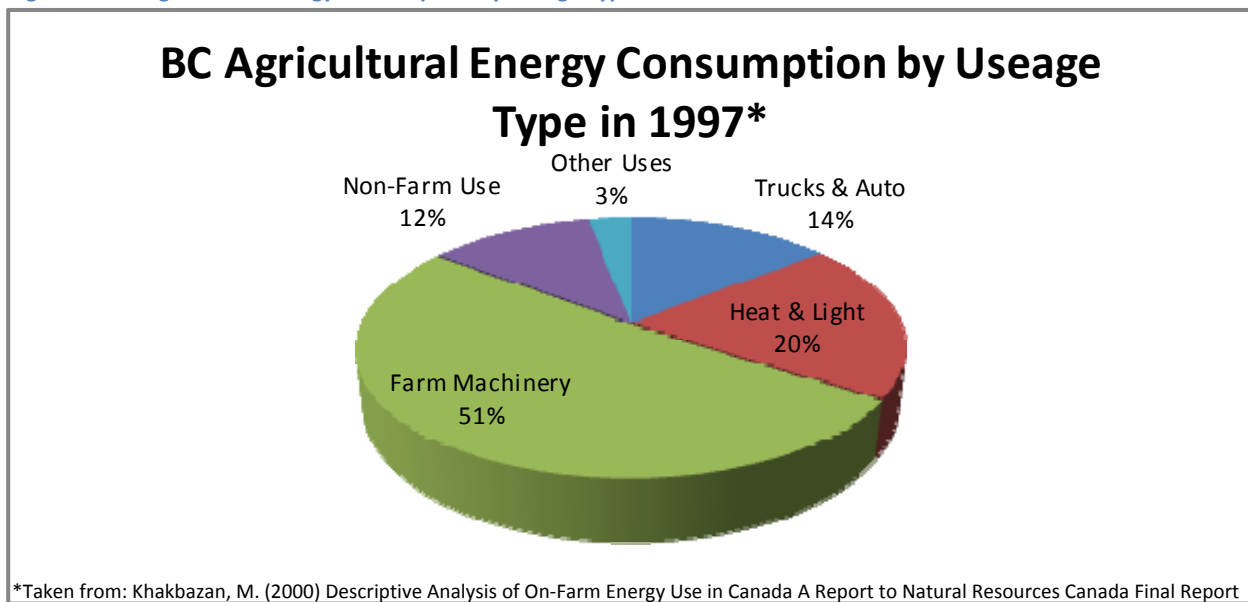
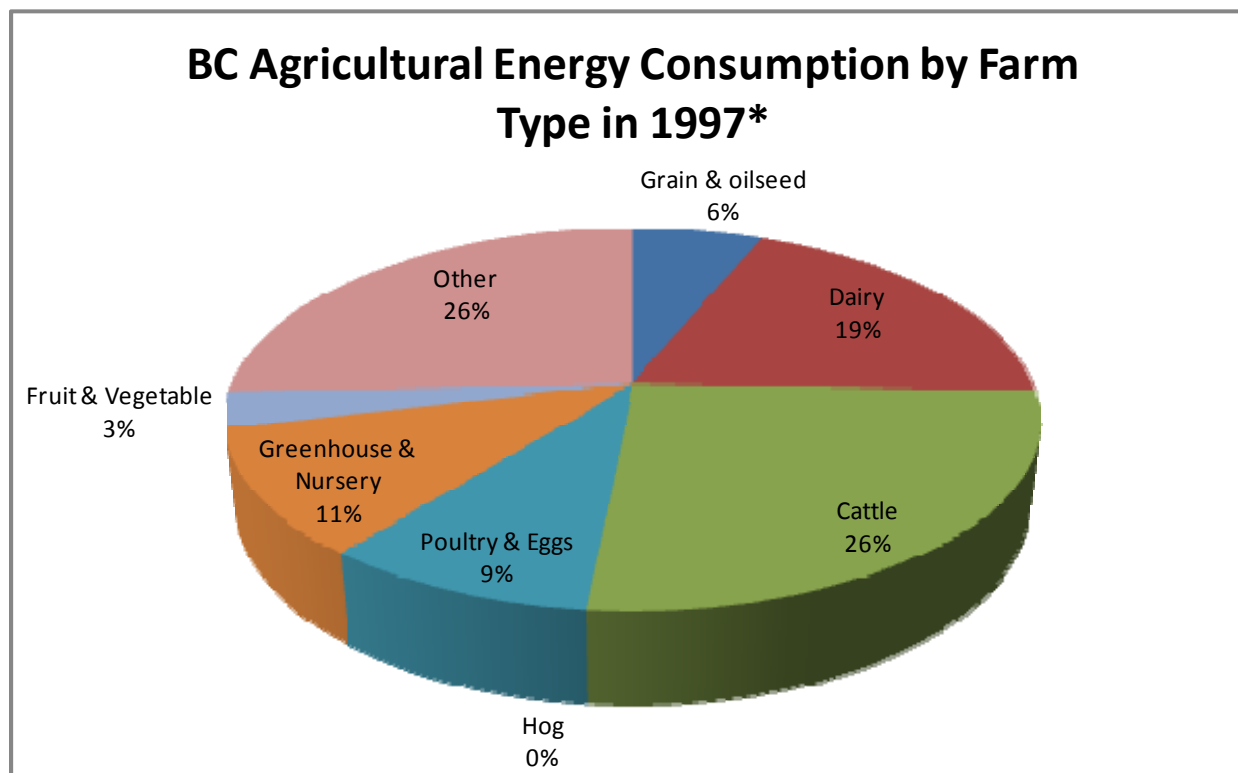


Figure 42: BC Agricultural Energy Consumption by Farm Type in 1997



*Taken from: Khakbazan, M. (2000) Descriptive Analysis of On-Farm Energy Use in Canada A Report to Natural Resources Canada Final Report

2.3.12 Alternative Energy

Bio-digesters

Anaerobic bio-digesters use established technology to break down organic waste through a bacterial process that produces biogas, which can then be used for combustion or heat and energy generation. All emissions are fully contained and the process can utilize organic pollutants such as animal waste. On-farm digesters are useful for manure management and produce electricity for the farming operation. Bio-digestion by-products also have potential for use as fertilizer or soil conditioner. Bio-digesters produce offensive odours, which must be taken into consideration during site evaluation.

Digester technology, and energy costs, may have reached a point where are cost effective ways to reduce energy costs and potentially supplement farm income. The scale that digesters must be operated at may not be present in the region at this time. Digesters are available in smaller sizes for farms producing manure from as few as 200 cows. Most farms in this region are not large enough to solely support a bio-digester and additional materials from a surrounding area would be required to supplement the process. However, there may be potential for sub-regional bio-digesters in the future. Regional District bylaws should be prepared to accommodate this use in appropriate locations in advance.

Co-generation and Biomass Energy for Greenhouses

Cogeneration systems enable flexibility in generation and energy usage options. Combined heat and power plants consume less fuel compared to separate systems to produce the same amount of power. As a result, cogeneration can help to reduce regional industrial emissions associated with energy production. Due to its great energy utilization rate and contribution to photosynthesis, cogeneration reaches its maximum level of effectiveness when applied to greenhouses.

In 2009 GE Energy opened its North America's first GE-designed greenhouse cogeneration facility in southern Ontario. The plant was installed to generate onsite power and heat for commercial greenhouses and help to reduce its emissions from power generation via natural gas-fired cogeneration modules. In addition, carbon emissions are sequestered for use as fertilizer in the greenhouses.

Greenhouse operations are heavy users of fossil fuels. The high cost of heating a greenhouse using natural gas is fueling interest in alternate fuels. By operating in conjunction with biomass energy production, greenhouse operations can come closer to being carbon neutral. Wood is the largest bioenergy feedstock resource in BC and the pine beetle infestation has produced a large amount of low-value wood and wood waste. Additionally, local mill residues will increase over the next two decades because the harvested beetlewood is of lower quality and less of it will meet the quality standards for traditional wood products.

Trace Resources of Merritt B.C. is producing biomass fuel that is used by the co-gen plant at the Domtar pulp mill in Kamloops, B.C. to produce electricity, and some of the fibre is also being used to heat vegetable greenhouses around the Vancouver area. Another company, SunSelect Produce Inc. of Aldergrove, BC, has reduced its fuel costs, obtained carbon credits, and generated an environmentally friendly company image by converting its greenhouses from natural gas to biomass heating and installing energy-saving heat curtains to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The biomass boilers are fuelled by wood waste obtained from a local sawmill.

The production of biochar can also be incorporated into the biomass energy generation process. Biochar is a fine-grained, highly porous charcoal that helps soils retain nutrients and water. It is produced through pyrolysis: a process that heat biomass under reduced oxygen levels. Recent research conducted in Quebec produced promising results for the use of biochar in forage crops for dairy production and showed improvements in plant nutritional values. There are several Canadian companies such as Dynamotive Energy Systems, Agri-THERM, and Advanced Biorefinery that are experts in the pyrolysis field, but have yet to use the resulting biochar effectively. The agricultural use of biochar is considered carbon-negative and may have potential to tap into the global carbon credit trading system.

2.3.13 Funding and Grant Opportunities

Funding and grant opportunities are available for agriculture organizations, producers, processors, and local government in the Bulkley-Nechako Region. Virtually all agricultural funding originates from government sources. The challenges to farmers in the Regional District with regards to funding opportunities lie within both capacity and knowledge. Farmer's may not be aware of funding opportunities, nor may they have the time, ability, or supporting information to properly seek funding or grant opportunities. This creates a significant barrier to what might be readily available funding opportunities for agricultural producers and processors. A further barrier to significant funding may be the lack of a Farmer's Institute in the region that represents broad agricultural interests. Often, funding is only available to these organizations, and not to individuals or businesses. A farmer's institute would also assist in preparing funding applications and identifying potential sources of funding for farmers and farm businesses.

The RDBN can provide assistance to source grant funding for not-for profit organizations, including preparing project plans, finding funding, and grant writing assistance. However, it is noted that the RDBN is legally restricted in its ability to directly assist businesses or individuals. Aiding farmers with information and assistance with funding and grant application is a role that a District Agrologist could play, if the positions were reestablished in the region.

Major sources of funding available within BC include the following (descriptions taken from individual websites):

ARDCorp <http://www.ardcorp.ca>

The B.C. Agricultural Research & Development Corporation (ARDCorp) is the wholly owned subsidiary of the BC Agriculture Council. The company's purpose and mandate is to cost-effectively deliver programs and services to BC's primary agriculture industry.

Effective and efficient program delivery to BC's farmers and ranchers benefits both the individual producer and the agriculture industry as whole. Numerous funding opportunities are available.

Farm Credit Canada <http://www.fcc-fac.ca>

FCC is Canada's leading lender to [agriculture](#) and [agribusiness](#). FCC provides financing, insurance, software, learning programs and other business services to producers, agribusinesses and agri-food operations. FCC provides producer financing, agribusiness financing, alliances financing, venture capital, as well as loan life and accident insurance programs.

Investment Agriculture Foundation www.iafbc.ca

The Investment Agriculture Foundation strategically invests federal and provincial funds in support of innovative projects to benefit the agri-food industry in British Columbia. Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC is an industry-led, not-for-profit organization working to foster growth and innovation across British Columbia's agriculture and agri-food industry.

Canadian Cooperative Association <http://www.coopscanada.coop>

The Innovative Cooperatives Project (ICP) offers funding contributions to co-ops that:

- use innovative ways to address challenges in agriculture, or in rural and northern development
- offer innovative goods or services, or use innovative technology
- build the capacity and sustainability of the co-op sector as a whole.

Contributions range from \$5,000 to \$75,000 and are available to support the following types of activities:

- Feasibility studies and business plans
- Member education and development
- Governance & board training
- Co-op management training and development
- Development of co-op legal structure, by-laws and policies

Northern Development Initiative Trust <http://northerndevelopment.bc.ca/>

Northern Development Initiative Trust was formed by the Province of British Columbia from a portion of the assets of the sale of BC Rail. The purpose of the Northern Development Initiative is to give Northern communities the funding, control and a mechanism to identify and pursue new opportunities for stimulating sustainable economic growth and job creation in their regions.

Nechako-Kitimat Development Fund Society <http://nkdf.org/>

The Nechako-Kitimat Development Fund Society is a grant-making agency that assists the people of North West British Columbia, and in particular the Nechako region and Kitimat Village, by sponsoring sustainable economic and community stability projects in the area most affected by the Kemano project and the creation of the Nechako Reservoir. The Nechako-Kitimat Development Fund Society was jointly and equally created by the Government of British Columbia and Alcan Inc (now RioTinto Alcan).

Community Futures <http://www.communityfutures.ca>

Community Futures itself is funded through Western Economic Diversification Canada. It provides business loans to current or prospective entrepreneurs who may have had trouble accessing capital from traditional lenders. Loans received from a Community Futures are repayable and are negotiated at competitive interest rates. Community Futures in BC has played a significant role in entrepreneurial and community development.

Agriculture & Agri-Foods Canada

Agriculture & Agri-Foods Canada (AAFC) is a department of the Government of Canada. AAFC provides information, research and technology, and policies and programs to achieve an environmentally sustainable agriculture, agri-food and agri-based products sector, a competitive agriculture, agri-food and agri-based products sector that proactively manages risk, and an innovative agriculture, agri-food and agri-based products sector.

Agriculture and Agri-Foods Canada provides a host of funding and lending opportunities to agricultural operations in BC and Canada. A comprehensive list is available at:

<http://www.ats.agr.gc.ca/exp/5288-eng.htm>

Western Economic Diversification Canada <http://www.wd.gc.ca>

WEDC is another department of the Government of Canada. Western Economic Diversification Canada's (WD) mandate is to promote the development and diversification of the economy of Western Canada and advance the interests of the West in national economic policy. WD works to improve the long-term economic competitiveness of the West and the quality of life of its citizens by supporting a wide range of initiatives targeting inter-related project activities – [innovation](#), [business development](#) and [community economic development](#). These programs and services are supported by WD's [policy, advocacy and coordination](#) activities.

BC Innovation Council <http://www.bcic.ca/>

BCIC (British Columbia Innovation Council) develops entrepreneurial talent and commercializes technology. BCIC focuses on competitively positioning British Columbia in today's global knowledge economy in order to provide significant employment opportunities and a high standard of living for British Columbians. BCIC provides funding to both government and non-government.

The RDBN website also provides numerous links to funding sources in BC and Canada for small business, community organizations, not for profit, and individuals.

2.4 Farming Economics

2.4.1 External Competition and Industry Consolidation

Local farmers face the challenge of competing with international economies of scale and foreign subsidized agricultural products in an increasingly globalized agriculture economy. Workers in foreign countries may work for a fraction of what workers in Canada or BC might expect, making it incredibly difficult for area producers to be cost-competitive. Further, producers and processors in the RDBN must compete in aggressive and competitive national markets, such as the Alberta beef industry and national dairy pools

The food industry has consolidated into larger and increasingly vertically integrated production and distribution companies. This system has very little or no place for the small-scale local producers, who are competing with large, highly efficient, sophisticated, and predatory companies. Also, significant control of distribution is now in the hands of large retailers who have specific product volume and price requirements that cannot be met by smaller producers.

A series of factors have significantly affected the cattle industry, such as BSE risk and subsequent moratoriums on beef exports to the USA. A 2003 moratorium on exports severely impacted the cattle industry. External international competition has filled in the void left by this moratorium, leaving local ranchers with a fraction of the market share that they once held. A strong Canadian dollar relative to the American dollar has also created challenges for beef exports in recent years.

2.4.2 Production Costs

Farmers must meet a critical threshold of sales to cover their production and overhead costs, let alone make a profit. Industry consolidation and waning access to local markets in previous decades has resulted in reduced production for many products, as farmers cannot rely on agriculture for a stable income.

The cost of farming implements and fuel has also risen, which in turn affects the price of fuel, feed, fertilizers and other products sensitive to rising and or fluctuating oil and gas prices. Farmers in the RDBN have stated this as a major consideration contributing to farm viability. This combined with rising electricity rates in BC also makes food storage increasingly costly, especially in a climate that requires extensive cooling in summer months and heating in winter months. In addition, the short growing season in the RDBN creates challenges that producers in the southern areas of the province do not have to face.

In some cases, such as meat processing, increasingly stringent and complex health and safety regulatory frameworks make it cost-prohibitive for small producers to invest in production or processing facilities that meet required provincial or federal standards.

Historically, many ranchers have relied on supplementary income, primarily from the logging industry as a way to supplement and sustain their agricultural operation. However, changes in the global lumber markets and the effects of the Mountain Pine beetle epidemic have reduced the ability of farmers to rely on income from logging.

Agriculture in the RDBN is further challenged by the geography of the region. Despite many of the population centres of the region being located on a major highway, the Region is separated by notable distance from the rest of the province and country. It becomes difficult for farmers to access distant markets when the cost of transportation to those markets makes their products more expensive when they finally reach the consumer's hands. Rising fuel prices contribute greatly to this challenge.

2.4.3 Market Development and Access

The local market is the entry point for most new and small agricultural operations. Until a farmer or producer reaches a certain size threshold, production capability, or level of sophistication, they rely on this source of income to support their farm business. Survey results indicate that many farmers in the region have difficulty accessing local markets, despite an apparent interest in the purchase of local agricultural products. Responses also indicated that despite this apparent desire, a lack of local market development may also be a contributing factor to access difficulties. Respondents to the RDBN Producer Survey indicate that training in business skills and marketing would assist them in accessing markets.

Barriers to market development and access can be both situational and legislative. These can include a lack of farmers' markets, the purchasing structure and policies of chain groceries, or strict meat processing regulations. Large retailers tend not to purchase from multiple small and/or local farmers.

More significant to the development of this sector, however are legislative and regulatory barriers that make it difficult for new or small producers to supply produce to the commercial market. Although usually rooted in health and safety concerns, regulatory barriers have often evolved to the point where they create artificial barriers for new entrants to the industry, thereby favouring traditional, large and established suppliers.

The reduced capability of the Ministry of Agriculture to provide extension services has also compounded the challenge for local producers. Increased complexity of regulation combined with reduced support in navigating the bureaucracy has placed both time and financial burdens on producers as discussed previously in Section 2.2.2.

2.5 Creating a Market

2.5.1 Expanding Local Markets

Improving market access for operators of small local farms and helping them to compete effectively outside the supermarket system and wholesale market will have a significant impact on the profitability of local agriculture. Local producers may be able to capitalize on the unique characteristics of their products. The large industry consolidated grocery stores operate similar formats and share relatively common characteristics in terms of size, assortments, service levels and pricing. Distinctiveness is a powerful strategy when competing with large industry. Retail competition based on differentiation is efficient from both the retailer and consumer perspective.

Increasing public awareness may be the most efficient way to increase consumption of local food products. Consumers must be convinced of the many benefits of consuming local foods, and must be convinced that it is worth their effort to seek out local foods. The benefits of purchasing local foods are numerous and include:

- Products tend to be high-quality and are often raised or grown with minimal or exposure to pesticides and fertilizers
- Products are more fresh and therefore have a longer shelf life
- Products may be unique and unavailable in chain stores
- Supports the local economy and the local farmer
- Contributes to food security
- Contributes to the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions

This increased awareness of the benefits of local food must also be accompanied with an awareness of how to find local foods. Consumers will only go so far out of their way to consume local foods. It must be relatively convenient. This link between producers and consumers is crucial. There are many people who wish to purchase local food products but are unsure where to get them. Additionally, many farmers rely on word of mouth and farm gate sales to market their products. Local producer directories and farmers' markets are used to a lesser extent to market farm goods. In order to attract new customers, existing marketing strategies need to be strengthened and expanded and new marketing strategies must be developed. There are various local initiatives such as the Nechako Valley Food Network and the Groundbreakers Collective that are taking a new approach to local agriculture.

2.5.2 Marketing and Distribution

Food Box Programs

In the Regional District survey, consumer support for food box programs was mixed. Most people were unsure if they would participate in such as program, depending on food box content and pricing. A number of responses indicated that vegetable food boxes are only available seasonally, when many people grow their own vegetable gardens. There may be an

opportunity for off-season vegetable boxes of select local products should adequate cold storage facilities be available.

Producer Directories and Websites

Producer directories form an integral link between local producers and consumers. There are several excellent examples of producer directories within the region both online and in print, including:

- The Nechako Valley Food Network <http://www.nvfoodnetwork.ca/>
- The Bulkley Valley Farmers' Market Local Food Directory <http://www.bvfarmersmarket.com/fooddirectory.html>; and
- Community Futures Development Corporation's Beyond the Market website <http://www.beyondthemarket.ca/>.

Individual producer websites are an integral means of attracting new customers and marketing farm products. By having a website, farmers can make the most of exposure gained through online producer directories. Some local producers even offer direct sales through the use of online order forms. Effective website design is important and many farmers do not know how to get their farm online. Training and support regarding this medium would be a valuable asset to local farmers. The Community Futures Development Corporation's Beyond the Market website is considered to be an excellent opportunity to marketing, networking, capacity building, and education in support of local agriculture. The Community Futures Development Corporation is strongly encouraged to maintain the long-term operation of their Beyond the Market web site.

Farm Gate Sales

The most significant constraint to farm gate sales (of meat) is the provincial Meat Inspection Regulation (MIR). Since the MIR came into effect in 2007, farmers can no longer slaughter and butcher their own animals for sale from their farms. Animals must be transported to an inspected facility, which are regionally located. Some farmers continue to provide farm gate sales outside of provincial regulation, but many farmers were forced to reduce herd sizes from lack of inspected facilities.

Farmers' Markets

Farmers' markets are generally well supported (in principle) by local consumers. The survey results indicated that most people were happy with their local farmers' market and encouraged expansion of product variety and availability as well as longer business hours. Some respondents felt that product prices were high and that the baking and craft sector tends to be over-represented. The Regional District is very supportive of local farmers' markets and is actively assisting them with marketing support.

In 2010, the RDBN invited Farmers' Markets within the region to attend the first RDBN Farmers' Market meeting. The focal point of the meeting was to determine ways for the RDBN to provide support for this growing industry. The meeting, attended by all markets within the region provided concrete feedback as to how the RDBN could assist the markets. As a result, the

RDBN facilitated educational and marketing initiatives. The RDBN hosted three education sessions, *Market Manager Training*, *MarketSafe* (offered in three communities) and *How to Implement a Coupon Program*. The sessions all had excellent attendance.

In the spring of 2011, market representatives formed the 'Bulkley-Stuart-Nechako Farmers' Markets' (BSNFM). The BSNFM includes all operating markets within the region. The BSNFM name will create brand recognition for the region's markets. To strengthen brand recognition, a BSNFM logo was created through a regional logo contest. The BSNFM logo will appear on permanent highway signs and market banners. Funding for the signs and banners was secured through grant funding. Implementation of the sign and banner project is the responsibility of the RDBN.

As a result, of this RDBN initiated relationship a *Best Practices* document was compiled. With input from all markets the document includes, successes, challenges, tips on attracting customers and other market related issues. The *Best Practices* document is available on the RDBN website.

2.5.3 Local Food Initiatives

Nechako Valley Food Network

The main purpose of this volunteer group is to promote and facilitate the growth and consumption of local produce. The initiatives of this group include the following:

- Building a database of local producers and interested consumers, that can be used by both parties to find where and when local foods are available.
- Publication of a print directory of local producers.
- Facilitate the consideration of a centralized location for selling local products year round by connecting local producers with Farmers' Cooperative case studies from other northern BC communities.
- Offer a supportive role to local foods meal initiatives in schools by strengthening the links between the School District and local producers.
- Research the feasibility of a community or inter-agency community garden.
- Maintain a Nechako Valley food Network website.
- Coordinate and support community education/awareness events to raise the profile of the benefits of locally grown foods and to educate about food related issues.
- Continue to support and promote the Farmers' market

Groundbreakers Collective

The Groundbreakers Collective's mission is to promote the production and consumption of local food at fair value by linking food consumers, producers and social service agencies together to participate in agricultural activities and education in the Bulkley Valley.

Groundbreakers Co-op plan to offer members harvest boxes, food and farm based educational workshops, value added products, and food/agriculture centered events. The co-op also plans to grow produce at two demonstration gardens, as well as contract local farmers in the Bulkley Valley. They use community shared agriculture (CSA) business model to help producers plan and operate more efficiently, and to facilitate bioregional and seasonal eating for consumers.

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SECTION 3: THE ACTION PLAN



3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 RDBN Direct Action

The actions identified in this section are designed to be achievable by the RDBN. This practical approach required that consideration was given to the budget implications, the legislative authority of regional districts, the capacity and strengths of the RDBN, and the capacity and strengths of other groups and agencies in the region. A number of recommendations involve the monitoring of the use and development of agricultural lands to measure the success of this plan and track the growth and vitality of agriculture in the region. This monitoring will also enable the regional district to identify any issues or trends that may have potential negative impact on agriculture.

3.1.2 RDBN Recommendations to Senior Government

The recommendations made to senior levels of government are designed to be reasonable and practical in that they can be achieved without significant financial, policy, or legislative changes. The recommendations are made with consideration given to the jurisdiction and responsibilities of the provincial and federal governments. The methods of communicating the recommendations to government, and the efforts made to sustain a lobby in support of the recommendations must be determined at the discretion of the RDBN Board.

3.1.3 RDBN Recommendations to Others

The recommendations made to other groups and agencies are designed to take advantage of their expertise, roles, and mandates. It is noted that many of the groups and organizations obtain funding from the RDBN or senior levels of government. Therefore, they may require RDBN financial support, or RDBN support in helping maintain or increase funding from senior government.

3.2 Land Issues

3.2.1 RDBN Direct Action

- a. The RDBN should undertake a Land Use Inventory in select high value agricultural areas to identify and monitor agricultural activity, non-farm uses, and unused agricultural lands.
- b. The RDBN should take advantage of opportunities to encourage the private rental/lease of fallow farm land, and increase awareness of the Land Conservancy of BC document: *A Guide to Farmland Access Agreements*.
- c. The RDBN should take advantage of opportunities to promote the Environmental Farm Plan program, and support environmental sensitive area rehabilitation projects on agricultural lands, within the region.
- d. The RDBN should continue with its efforts to protect and preserve farm land and soil having capability for agricultural purposes through the restriction of subdivision, and limited encroachment of non-farm uses.

3.2.2 RDBN Recommendations to Senior Government

- a. The RDBN should ask the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations to evaluate their policy on establishing the lease and purchase price for agricultural lands within the Northern Service Region. The price to lease or purchase agricultural lease should reflect the value of the land for agricultural purposes, instead of its residential value.
- b. The RDBN should ask the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations to consult with the users of range lands when planning and undertaking logging activities within the range lands. The Ministry should also support range users by educating logging contractors about respecting agricultural infrastructure when operating on range lands.
- c. The RDBN should ask the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations to investigate opportunities for increasing the availability of agricultural leases and licenses as well as the development of new community pastures, within mountain pine beetle affected areas.
- d. The RDBN should ask the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations to ensure that Crown lands that are dedicated to forage as the primary use be protected from the planting or replanting of trees.
- e. The RDBN should continue to ask the provincial government for increased funding and increased local input into the control of invasive plants within the region.
- f. The RDBN should ask the Ministry of Forests, Land and Natural Resource Operations and the Ministry of Transportation to undertake invasive plant control measures in provincial forests, parkland and road right-of-ways.

- g. The RDBN should ask the provincial government to consider developing taxation incentives to encourage the rental or lease of unused privately owned agricultural lands to agricultural users.
- h. The RDBN should ask the provincial government to continue its funding and promotion of the Environmental Farm Plan program.
- i. The RDBN should ask the Ministry of Environment to investigate and consider the impact of increased elk and deer populations in the region on agriculture, and consider appropriate methods of population control in farming areas.
- j. The RDBN should ask the Agricultural Land Commission to consider changes to the *Agricultural Land Commission Act* and /or the associated *Agricultural Land Reserve Use, Subdivision, and Procedure Regulation* to restrict the sterilization of productive agricultural lands for agricultural purposes by planting of trees not intended for harvest as an agricultural crop. This is not intended to apply to the planting of trees for the purpose of protecting or rehabilitating an environmentally sensitive area.
- k. The RDBN should ask the province to re-establish the District Agrologist positions in the Smithers and Vanderhoof areas to provide meaningful local input into the ALR application decision making process, as well as the review of other pertinent government documents.

3.2.3 RDBN Recommendations to Others

- a. The RDBN should continue to ask CN Rail to initiate control of invasive plants within their entire rights-of-way.
- b. The RDBN should continue to ask BC Hydro to control invasive plants their rights-of-way.
- c. The Community Futures Development Corporation should be encouraged to include a directory of farmland available for rental, lease, or sale in their Beyond the Market website.

3.3 Regulation Based Issues

3.3.1 RDBN Direct Action

- a. The RDBN should consider the inclusion of the Official Community Plan (OCP) goals and policies, identified in Section 1.4.3 of this plan, in all OCPs.
- b. The RDBN should consider amending “Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako Zoning Bylaw No. 700, 1994” to include the land use regulations proposed in Section 1.4.3 of this plan.
- c. The RDBN should monitor the number of subdivisions and non-farm uses approved in the ALR.

3.3.2 RDBN Recommendations to Senior Government

- a. The RDBN should ask the province to re-establish the District Agrologist positions in the Smithers and Vanderhoof areas in order to assist agricultural producers in navigating the complex of regulations and regulatory processes. District Agrologists are also needed to play a liaison role between provincial regulators and producers.

3.3.3 RDBN Recommendations to Others

- a. The RDBN should ask ICBC should change the Farm Vehicle Use Restrictions in order to allow processed farm goods to be transported in a licensed farm truck.

3.4 Development and Resource Issues

3.4.1 RDBN Direct Action

- a. The RDBN should actively promote and support 4H clubs in the region.
- b. The RDBN should actively support and promote the use of alternative energy sources such as bio-digesters, co-generation, biomass energy, and wind power by agricultural operations.

3.4.2 RDBN Recommendations to Senior Government

- a. The RDBN should lobby the province to re-establish the District Agrologist positions in the Smithers, Vanderhoof and Prince George areas to work with agricultural producers in accessing and understanding information regarding local agricultural production methods and practices. This may include actions such as the development of agricultural production guides specific to Northern BC.
- b. The RDBN should ask the provincial government to ensure that any changes to meat inspection services do not overburden small-scale producers and processors.

3.4.3 RDBN Recommendations to Others

- a. The RDBN should encourage the Community Futures Development Corporation to develop programs and projects to facilitate farm succession, and the recruitment and training of new agricultural producers. This may include ideas such as a new farmer mentoring programs, marketing training, web site design and operation training, etc.
- b. The RDBN should encourage the Community Futures Development Corporation to continue its good work to identify, and facilitate the development of, markets for local foods.
- c. The RDBN should encourage the College of New Caledonia, North West Community College and the University of Northern British Columbia to provide educational opportunities relevant to regional agricultural producers and the agriculture industry.
- d. The RDBN should encourage regional farming industry organizations to become more involved in identifying and organizing succession and mentoring programs and opportunities.

3.5 Creating a Market

3.5.1 RDBN Direct Action

- a. The RDBN should undertake a long-term low level marketing campaign to maintain public awareness of the benefits of looking of purchasing local food products. This may include the development of information posters and brochures, the purchase of local food products for events, and the inclusion of reminders notes in newsletters and other promotional materials.
- b. The RDBN should support the long-term operation of the Beyond the Market web site, which includes a producer directory, and is created and managed by the Community Futures Development Corporation.
- c. The RDBN should continue to provide support to the farmers' markets operating in the region.
- d. The RDBN should support local initiatives designed to support and facilitate the production and consumption of local foods. Examples of such organizations include the Nechako Valley food Network and the Groundbreakers Collective.
- e. The RDBN should provide assistance to agricultural producer groups and organizations in identifying sources of grant funding, and grant writing, within the constraints set by the *Community Charter*.
- f. The RDBN should continue to develop and maintain a website dedicated to the agricultural industry within the region.

3.5.2 RDBN Recommendations to Senior Government

- a. The RDBN should encourage the Provincial and Federal governments to continue with long-term funding for organizations and programs that promote the consumption of local foods, developing local markets, and building the capacity of local producers.

3.5.3 RDBN Recommendations to Others

- a. The RDBN should encourage the Community Futures Development Corporation to implement projects and programs designed to increase the capacity of agricultural products producers to operate a business, identify business opportunities, and take advantage of business opportunities. The Community Futures Development Corporation is also encouraged to maintain the long-term operation of their Beyond the Market web site.
- b. The RDBN should encourage municipalities within the RDBN to ensure that their farmers' market in their area has access to an appropriate site for their market.

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APPENDICES

- 1. Highlights of the RDBN Agriculture Plan Regional Workshops**
- 2. Consumer Survey – Detailed Summary of Responses**
- 3. Producer Survey – Detailed Summary of Responses**

