

RDBN Food and Agriculture Plan

Regional District of Bulkley Nechako
April 2020

Prepared for



Prepared by



Acronyms

AAFC	Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
AGRI	BC Ministry of Agriculture
ALC	Agricultural Land Commission
ALR	Agricultural Land Reserve
ALUI	Agricultural Land Use Inventory
AITC	BC Agriculture in the Classroom
BC 4-H	Local 4-H Program Districts & Clubs
BCCA	BC Cattlemen's Association
BCAC	BC Agriculture Council
BCFC	BC Forage Council
BCFI	BC Farmers Institute
BCMoe	BC Ministry of Environment
BCWS	BC Wildfire Service
BCYA	BC Young Agrarians
BNFFG	Bulkley-Nechako Fraser-Fort George
BVGB	Bulkley Valley Ground Breakers
CAI	BC Agriculture & Food Climate Action Initiative
CAP	Canadian Agriculture Partnership
CFBC	Community Futures British Columbia
CRI	Community Resiliency Investment
EFP	Environmental Farm Plan
EMBC	Emergency Management of BC
EOC	Emergency Operation Centre
FAWG	Food & Agriculture Working Group
FESBC	Forest Enhancement Society of BC
FLNRORD	BC Min of Forest, Land, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development
FSBC	Farm to School BC
GIA	RDBN Grant in Aid
HC	Health Canada
HRVA	Hazard Risk and Vulnerability Assessment
IAF	Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC
NDIT	Northern Development Initiative Trust
NHA	Northern Health Authority
NVFN	Nechako Valley Food Network
NVRCA	Nechako Valley Regional Cattlemen's Association
NWIPC	Northwest Invasive Plant Council
OCP	Official Community Plan
PVCA	Pleasant Valley Cattlemen's Association
RDBN	Regional District of Bulkley Nechako
RDFFG	Regional District of Fraser-Fort George
SD 54	School District 54 - Bulkley Valley
SD 91	School District 91 - Nechako Lakes
SFI	Smithers Farmers Institute
SSFPA	Small Scale Food Processor Association
UBCM	Union of BC Municipalities
UNBC	University of Northern British Columbia
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
ZBL	Zoning By-laws

Acknowledgements

RDBN Staff:

Curtis Helgesen, Chief Administrative Officer
Cheryl Anderson, Manager of Administrative Services
Nellie Davis, Regional Economic Development Coordinator
Shari Janzen, Economic Development Assistant
Deborah Jones-Middleton, Director of Protective Services
Rebecca Rodriguez, Acting Emergency Services Manager
Janette Derksen, Deputy Director of Environmental Services
Jason Llewellyn, Director of Planning
Maria Sandberg, Planner
Jennifer MacIntyre, Planner 1
John Illes, Chief Financial Officer
Debbie Evans, Agriculture Coordinator
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RDBN Board of Directors 2019

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Director Rob Newell - Area G, Houston Rural
Director Chris Newell-- Area G, Houston Rural

Food and Agriculture Working Group

Mark Parker - RDBN Director, Area D, Fraser Lake Rural
Michelle Roberge - Bioscape Farm, Vanderhoof
Joyce Dieleman - Thompson Creek Beef, Telkwa
Megan D'arcy - Unity Gardens & Farm, Smithers Farmers' Institute, Smithers
Kandace Kerr - Fort St. James
Serena Black - General Manager, BC Forage Council
John Stevenson - Regional Agrologist, BC Ministry of Agriculture, Smithers
Karen Tabe - Regional Agrologist, BC Ministry of Agriculture, Vanderhoof
Laurel Burton - Population Health Dietician, Regional Lead, Food Security, Northern Health
Darrell Hill - Field Coordinator, North West Invasive Plant Council, Burns Lake
Debbie Evans - RDBN Agriculture Coordinator, Burns Lake
Janine de la Salle - Principal, Urban Food Strategies, Vancouver

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Introduction

Food and Agriculture are a Significant Part of Our Region's Culture, Environment, and Economy

Food and agriculture play a critical and significant role in the history, and the growth and development of the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako (RDBN). Agriculture continues to contribute significantly to the economy and character of our region. Given this significance, the RDBN Board has initiated the update of the 2012 Agricultural Plan to ensure that the RDBN is doing all that it can to work with senior levels of government, non-profit organizations, industry associations and others to protect and enhance the viability and vitality of food and agriculture in the region.

Agriculture in the RDBN has both deep and fresh roots. The beef sector continues to be the dominant and most well-established sector. More recently, growth in small farms producing a range of fresh produce, eggs, and honey is contributing to the diversification on-farm as well as throughout the sector. Regardless of the nature of the farm enterprise, ranchers and farmers choose the RDBN for its favourable agricultural attributes. The comparative advantages for farming in the RDBN include but are not limited to:

- ✓ **Affordable land prices:** Especially when compared to other more urban regions, agricultural land in the RDBN remains relatively affordable on a cost per hectare basis.
- ✓ **Air and water quality:** The favourable biophysical conditions for a range of agricultural activities in many areas of the RDBN, is an important natural resource that enables producers to claim product quality related to these features as part of their unique selling proposition when marketing and distributing their products.
- ✓ **Lack of urban rural conflict:** As a largely rural region, the RDBN does not experience the same degree of urban and rural conflict associated with agriculture and urban areas in close proximity (i.e. residential uses conflicting with farm uses e.g. noise, dust, sound, smell).
- ✓ **Strong industry associations:** There are many active industry associations and non-profit groups that work to support producers in their respective focus areas. For example, the Cattlemen's Association, the Smithers Farmers Institute, and the Northwest Invasive Plant Council work all support different parts of the success of regional agriculture.
- ✓ **Vigour, vitality, and resiliency of producers:** Especially visible after the 2018 fire season, the level of community that exists within producers, the larger community, and regional government was demonstrated. With a short growing season, producers have to take full advantage of the productive times of year and withstand the longer season of overwintering herds and crops. This dynamic contributes to a culture of hard-working, problem-solving, and mutually supportive producers.

2019 witnessed a record downturn in the BC forestry industry, with over 20 mills closing, costing BC communities over 3,000 jobs.¹ Structural issues such as high log prices and decreased timber supply are identified as key drivers in this downturn.² With the loss of forestry jobs that provide the economic

¹ <https://vancouversun.com/news/local-news/forestry-crisis-shows-up-with-deepening-decline-in-b-c-s-trade-figures>

² <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/dwindling-supply-high-fees-blamed-for-downturn-in-b-c-forestry-1.5284570>

lifeblood for many rural communities in the province, including in the RDBN, many communities are looking for ways to diversify the economy and create viable livelihoods for a range of people. As a result, a renewed focus on agriculture and non-timber forest products is occurring. Updating the RDBN 2012 Agriculture Plan is part of the movement to increase the economics and opportunities in food and agriculture.

Food and agriculture has been, is, and will continue to be an important part of the culture, economy, and environment of the Regional District of Bulkley Nechako (RDBN). To support the success of the industry, an Agriculture Plan was developed in 2012. Since then many new challenges and opportunities have emerged. In the summer of 2019, the RDBN contracted Urban and Regional Food Strategies to support the updating of the 2012 Agriculture Plan.

Five Goals of the Agriculture Plan Update

1. Update baseline data and information on the food and agriculture sector in the RDBN.
2. Engage stakeholders in creating a shared vision for food and agriculture in the RDBN and updating the 2012 (food) and agriculture plan.
3. Update policies and actions to reflect new data and information, consumer and producer perspectives, as well as provincial legislative changes.
4. Establish a sound factual basis for informing recommendations and decision making.
5. Create a detailed 5-7year action and implementation plan to support plan recommendations.

What is a Food and Agriculture Plan and How Will it Support Agriculture?

A food and agricultural plan is a strategic planning document that will help to develop a shared vision for food and agriculture amongst farmers, the public, and local government within the Regional District as well as goals, objectives and actions for achieving the vision. Upon completion, the agricultural plan will be approved by the Regional District Board of Directors and used to guide future activities affecting agriculture. The RDBN intends to use the updated Food and Agriculture Plan to:

- ✓ Guide both leading and supporting activities that address the eight priority areas in the Plan.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ Ensure that decisions regarding the use of the RDBN’s resources are made in consideration of the recommendations made in the plan.



How the RDBN Food and Agriculture - Plan was Updated

Many groups and individuals contributed to updating the RDBN Food and Agriculture - Plan. These groups are listed in the Acknowledgement section at the beginning of this report. This plan was updated through three phases that included research, engagement, and analysis activities. A full summary of outcomes from the research and engagement are located in the *Foundations Report*, a companion document to this Plan.

Phase 1	Project Start up meeting	June 6-19
	Communications and Engagement strategy	July 9- 19
	RDBN Staff workshop	Sept 10- 19
Phase 2	Consumer survey	June 28- Oct 15- 19
	Producer survey	Aug 21- Oct 15- 19
	FAWG Meeting #1	Sept 30 ⁻¹⁹
	Stakeholder workshops:	
	Smithers	Oct 8- 19
	Vanderhoof	Oct 9- 19
	Burns Lake	Oct 10- 19
	Foundations Report (V1.0)	Nov 22- 19
Foundations Report (V2.0)	Dec 2 ⁻¹⁹	
FAWG Meeting #2	Dec 10- 19	
Phase 3	RDBN Food and Agriculture Plan (V1.0)	Feb 21-20
	FAWG Meeting #3	Feb 26-20
	Present plan to RDBN Rural & Ag Committee	March 5-20
	RDBN Food and Agriculture Plan (V2.0)	March 24
	RDBN Board of Directors Approved Plan	March 19
	Develop and execute marketing plan	Mar - Onward



Photo credit: Marlene Thimer

How to Use This Document

This plan contains the vision, priority areas, action areas, and implementation considerations as well as a phased implementation plan with a high-level assessment of resources needed and lead/support roles. The *Foundations Report* developed in Phase 2 serves as a companion document that contains the vast majority of background information that provides the basis for the Plan recommendations.

How the RDBN Food and Agriculture - Plan is Presented

This Food and Agriculture Plan is presented not only with recommendations, but also additional information that will support staff in developing budgets and workplans to deliver on the Plan priorities.

Action Areas and Implementation Considerations

1.1, 1.2, 1.3, etc.: Describes the specific action(s) required to meet the stated priority. Implementation considerations provide specific ideas on how the RDBN could take next steps in the action and priority areas. They are intended to inspire implementation without being overly prescriptive, allowing for the plan to be adaptive to new information, funding sources, staff resources, while also remaining aligned with the overall vision and priorities.

Potential Key Players

Lead(s): One or more agencies that could take a lead role in embarking upon the activity.
Support(s): One or more agencies that could partner to assist with implementing the action.

Urgency Level

High: Requires urgent action for progress to be made and/or for other actions to succeed.
Medium: Not critical for actions to move forward, but necessary and important.
Low: Less important but still necessary for improvements in the local agriculture system

Timeframe

Short: To be completed within 1-3 years (by 2023)
Medium: To be completed within 3-5 years. (by 2025)
Long: To be completed within 5-10 years (by 2030)
Ongoing: Will require continued efforts over the short-long term timeframe.

Funding Requirements and Potential Sources

Listed as Existing, Negligible, Low, Moderate, or Significant. Estimated amount and potential granting agencies included whenever possible. Please note that all funding sources noted in this plan are not confirmed and will require further consideration after the plan is approved. They are based on an estimate of best alignment and noted in order to provide a possible and practical path to implementation.

Vision for Food and Agriculture in the RDBN

RDBN Food and Agriculture: A World of Opportunity

Agriculture in the RDBN is diverse with many types and sizes of operations providing a significant amount of food to households in the region. New farmers and entrepreneurs are drawn to the world of opportunity for food and agriculture in the RDBN including the environment, affordable access to land and water, food processing and distribution infrastructure, and a culture that celebrates and appreciates food and farming in the RDBN. With so much activity, the RDBN is moving towards self-sufficiency and food security. Agriculture is adapting to a changing climate and is prepared for emergencies and recovery. RDBN grown, raised, or made products are proudly sold regionally, provincially, and internationally.



Top Priorities for Food and Agriculture in the RDBN

Through the research and engagement process, eight top priorities surfaced for the success and prosperity of RDBN agriculture. These are:

1. **Support producers in navigating government policies and requirements**
2. **Prepare for emergencies**
3. **Develop the food and agriculture sector and market(s) for RDBN goods**
4. **Engage a broad audience in regional food and agriculture activities and information**
5. **Prevent and manage invasive and harmful species**
6. **Ensure agricultural policies are in-place and consistent across the region**
7. **Increase climate change resiliency and adaptation capacity**
8. **Continue to build capacity for effective and strategic implementation**

In the following sections, each top priority is discussed and actions and implementation considerations within each are recommended. Each section contains a table that includes the action recommendation, implementation considerations, suggested key lead and support agencies, along with priority level, timeframe, funding requirements and potential funding sources. It is important to note that the inclusion of any organization or agency in this list *does not* translate into a commitment on their part to participate, rather it provides a suggestion regarding the appropriate type of leadership and support required in order for each action to succeed.

The overall responsibility for the implementation of the Food and Agriculture Plan rests with the RDBN itself and, therefore, some of the actions are steps that the Regional District can implement. However, this is truly a region-wide plan, and members of the farming community, supporting organizations, and senior levels of government are expected to collaborate and play a role in many of the actions.

Priority Area 1: Support Producers in Navigating Government Policies

Through engagement with producers, the need for clarifying government policies in order to help farm operations to be in compliance is identified as a key priority. With many levels of government regulation and policy that apply to food and agriculture, a condition of confusion for those intended to comply with the rules can exist. Further, helping producers to identify and communicate challenges within existing or proposed regulations is another key priority for the RDBN. As learned in this process, a proposed change to an existing regulation can be misunderstood and misinformation can follow, creating confusion and even conflict. Ultimately, there is common purpose and mutual gain in a prosperous and resilient food and agriculture sector that respects the environment. Working better together is a key strategy for realizing this common purpose.

Action Areas and Implementation Considerations for Addressing Priority 1

Priority Area 1: Support Producers in Navigating Government Policies				
Action Area and Implementation Considerations	Potential Lead and Support Roles	Urgency level	Timeframe	Resource requirements and potential sources
1.1 Develop a communication strategy to disseminate information to producers on government regulations affecting agriculture.	L = RDBN S = AGRI, FLINRORD, BCMoE, ALC, EFP	High	Short and ongoing	Moderate (\$10,000-\$15,000) Potential sources:: RDBN, AGRI
Implementation considerations: a) Request support from the AGRI in developing fact sheets, diagrams, webinars and other communication tools to help clarify the path to compliance with regulations. b) Continue to follow changes to the ALC act, specifically Bills 52 and 15 and include in communications strategy. c) Identify any areas of mis-information, lack of clarity, or conflicting policies to address in the communication strategy. d) Consider industry organizations that are also leading workshops and other producer events.	L = RDBN S = AGRI, BCAC, BCCA, FLINRORD, BCMoE, ALC, EFP	High	Short and Ongoing	Moderate (\$10,000 - \$15,000) Source: AGRI
1.2 Create and disseminate producer-focused tools to support clarity with the multiple levels of government regulation.	L = RDBN S = AGRI, AGRI, FLINRORD, BCMoE, ALC, EFP	High	Short and Ongoing	Moderate (\$10,000 - \$15,000) Potential sources:: RDBN, AGRI
Implementation considerations: a) Host workshops, field days, etc. communicate better understanding of govt regulations.	L = RDBN S = AGRI, AGRI, FLINRORD, BCMoE, ALC, EFP	High	Short and Ongoing	Moderate (\$10,000 - \$15,000) Potential sources: RDBN, AGRI

Priority Area 1: Support Producers in Navigating Government Policies

Action Area and Implementation Considerations	Potential Lead and Support Roles	Urgency level	Timeframe	Resource requirements and potential sources
b) Include communication tools on the RDBN website where appropriate (e.g. description of the role of rural directors and the Rural and Agricultural Committee, comment/feedback page).	L = RDBN	Medium	Ongoing	Existing staff time
c) Support local small-scale producers to navigate regulations to sell products to consumers and lobby on behalf of these producers to have their voice heard at NHA and HC.	L =RDBN S = NHA, HC, SSFPA, AGRI	Medium	Ongoing	Low (\$5,000-\$7,500) Potential source: RDBN, AGRI, GIA



Photo credit: Matt Williamson

Priority Area 2: Prepare for Natural Emergencies

The 2018 fire season signaled a new era of regional emergency preparedness overall as well as with specific response and recovery strategies for agriculture. Although much was learned during recent fire events, the RDBN was able to significantly contribute to the overall fire response effort. Having staff capacity through the Agriculture Coordinator position was one element. Existing relationships with producers and associations to mobilize efforts was another. In addition to the many ways RDBN is already preparing for future extreme events, this priority area focuses on ways to build on successes and lessons learned in emergency protocols and procedures for agriculture.

Action Areas and Implementation Considerations for Addressing Priority 2

Priority Area 2: Prepare for Emergencies				
Action Area and Implementation Considerations	Potential Lead and Support Roles	Urgency level	Timeframe	Resource requirements and Potential Sources
2.1 Update and publish RDBN Agriculture Emergency Preparedness Information.	L = RDBN	High	Short and ongoing	Existing staff time
Implementation considerations:	L = RDBN	High	Short and ongoing	Existing staff time
a) Keep publications up to date.	L = RDBN	High	Short and ongoing	Existing staff time
b) Ensure that information is in plain language and easy to navigate for a range of technological ability levels.	L = RDBN	High	Short and ongoing	Existing staff time
c) Consider strategies for how to disseminate information for those not on-line in both emergencies and non-emergencies.	L = RDBN	High	Short and ongoing	Existing staff time
2.2 Strengthen livestock emergency preparedness.	L = RDBN	Medium to high	Short and ongoing	Low to significant
Implementation considerations:	L = RDBN S = BCWS S = CAI	Medium	Short and ongoing	Moderate (\$5,000 - \$10,000) Potential sources:: RDBN
a) Host producer emergency preparedness workshops on Firesmart and livestock preparedness.	L = RDBN	Medium	Short and ongoing	Low (\$2,000 - \$4,000) Potential sources: RDBN
b) Host mock emergency exercises to help prepare RDBN staff and other EOC agencies as well as producers.	L = RDBN	Medium	Short and ongoing	Low (\$2,000 - \$4,000) Potential sources: RDBN
c) Develop a <i>risk mitigation of farmland</i> pilot program of BNFFG CAI for 2020 In 2021, to move towards producers being able to utilize on their farmland.	L = BNFFG S= CAI S = RDBN	High	Short and ongoing	Significant (\$50,000 - \$100,000) Potential sources: BNFFG CAI and other funding sources identified by CAI.

Priority Area 2: Prepare for Emergencies

Action Area and Implementation Considerations	Potential Lead and Support Roles	Urgency level	Timeframe	Resource requirements and Potential Sources
2.3 In the event of emergency, activate Agriculture Emergency plan within regional EOC in events involving agriculture.	L = RDBN S = EMBC	High	Short and ongoing	Potential sources: Existing staff time, EMBC
Implementation considerations: a) Update Agriculture Emergency plan with any lessons learned from past events and/or mock emergency exercises. b) Coordinate agriculture support in the EOC to assist producers in animal/feed movement/relocation.	L = RDBN S = EMBC	High	Short and ongoing	Potential sources: Existing staff time, EMBC
2.4 Strengthen responses for recovery from emergency events impacting agriculture.	L = RDBN S = EMBC	High	Short and ongoing	Potential sources RDBN staff
Implementation considerations: a) Advocate for Agri-Recovery funding for significant agriculture events to be administered by Risk Management Staff of AGRI.	L = RDBN S = AGRI	Medium	Short and ongoing	Significant Potential sources: CAP
2.5 Identify regional risk mitigation projects to assist producers.	L =RDBN	Medium	Short and ongoing	Moderate to significant
Implementation considerations: a) Identify projects for FESBC than can assist agriculture producers.	L = RDBN S = FESBC	Medium	Short and ongoing	Moderate (\$25,000- \$50,000) Potential sources: FESBC
b) Identify projects for CRI than can assist agriculture producers.	L = RDBN S = CRI	Medium	Short and ongoing	Significant (up to \$100,000) Potential sources: CRI
c) Prepare alternate route plans for producers in case of highway closures.	L =RDBN	High	Short	Existing staff time

Priority Area 3: Develop the RDBN Food and Agriculture Sector and Market(s)

Building on the sector development work already undertaken through hosting conferences and networking events, supporting community events, publishing the *Connecting Producers and Consumers Guide*, and generally building working relationships with the agriculture sector, the RDBN is well-positioned to continue to develop the sector and markets for RDBN products. Through working together on key challenges faced by farmers and food producers, as well as coordinating and promoting shared opportunities, such as establishing regional food processing and distribution infrastructure, the RDBN will continue to establish itself as an industry partner.

Action Areas and Implementation Considerations for Addressing Priority 3

Priority Area 3: Develop the RDBN Food and Agriculture Sector and Market (s)				
Action Area and Implementation Considerations	Potential Lead and Support Roles	Urgency level	Timeframe	Resource requirements and Potential Sources
3.1 Advocate for and facilitate access to affordable shavings and hay.	L= RDBN	High	Short	Low
Implementation considerations:	L = RDBN S = Producers	High	Short	Low (\$2,500 - \$10,000) Potential Source: NDIT
a) Explore potential using alternative materials in livestock bedding such as recycled cardboard.				
b) Advocate producer associations to continue research in the form of a feasibility study in establishing a more permanent shavings supply.	L = Producer Associations S = FLRNRORD, NDIT, UNBC and RDBN	High	Short	Low (\$2,500 - \$10,000) Potential Source: NDIT
c) Advocate for Business Plan development for a sustainable shavings industry.	L = Producers S = CFBC, NDIT	High	Short	Low (\$3,000 - \$10,000) Potential Source: CFBC, NDIT
d) Submit potential hay sellers who contact RDBN to the BCFC to add to their website hay list.	L = RDBN S = BCFC	Low	Short and ongoing	Negligible
3.2 Continue to update and distribute the <i>Connecting Producers and Consumers Guide</i> annually.	L= RDBN	Medium	Ongoing	Low
Implementation considerations:	L = RDBN	Medium	Ongoing	Existing RDBN Budget and staff time
a) Update and promote website content.				
b) Update and distribute printed booklet.				
c) Expand locations for where the guide is available.				
d) Track number of guides that are printed and distributed annually as well as number of participating				

Priority Area 3: Develop the RDBN Food and Agriculture Sector and Market (s)

Action Area and Implementation Considerations	Potential Lead and Support Roles	Urgency level	Timeframe	Resource requirements and Potential Sources
producers and other food businesses.				
3.3 Undertake a food hub feasibility study and a regional food economy assessment.	L = RDBN	High	Short	Medium
Implementation considerations: a) Hire qualified contractors to support the RDBN in undertaking a food hub feasibility study and regional food economy assessment.	L = RDBN S = NVFN	High	Short	Existing RDBN Budget 2020
b) Identify possible pilot projects of food processing and distribution hub(s) within the region and establish working group for each pilot and set objectives for increasing local food access.	L = RDBN S = Working Groups	High	Short	Existing RDBN Budget 2020
c) Hold workshops on cooperatives, SSFPA, etc.	L = RDBN	High	Short	Low (\$3,500 - \$7,500) Potential Source: RDBN, AGRI, CFBC
d) Support working group(s) to secure funding and pilot food hub(s), work on increasing local food consumption and supporting local food export beyond the region in such ways as processing, and tracking progress (e.g. number of participating producers, increased value and volume sold locally and exported).	L = RDBN S = NVFN, Working Groups	High	Short	Significant (\$50,000-\$100,000) Potential sources: AAFC, NDIT, AGRI, IAF
3.4 Undertake specific product market studies to better understand emerging opportunities.	L = RDBN	Low	Medium	Medium
Implementation Considerations a) Consider a market opportunity study for hemp and cannabis in the RDBN. b) Consider food and fibre products from farms as well as from non-timber forest products from forested ALR and crown land.	L = RDBN	Low	Medium	Med (\$15,000-\$20,000) Potential sources: RDBN, AGRI

Priority Area 3: Develop the RDBN Food and Agriculture Sector and Market (s)

Action Area and Implementation Considerations	Potential Lead and Support Roles	Urgency level	Timeframe	Resource requirements and Potential Sources
3.5 Develop an overall marketing plan and supportive print and online communication materials for promoting RDBN food and agriculture.	L=RDBN S= AGRI	Medium	Medium and ongoing	Med (\$15,000-\$20,000) Potential sources: RDBN, AGRI
Implementation Considerations: a) Consider developing, or collaborate in developing in a Planning for Profit in the North series	L= RDBN	Medium	Medium	Moderate (\$30,000-\$50,000) Potential sources: RDBN, NDIT, IAF, CFBC
b) Consider developing a regional brand to widely promote RDBN businesses that may be used in conjunction with province-wide branding as well as individual business brands.	L= RDBN	Medium	Medium	Moderate (\$30,000-\$50,000) Potential sources: RDBN, NDIT, IAF, CFBC
c) Support producers in training/workshops to market/transport RDBN product beyond the region.	L= RDBN	Medium and ongoing	Medium	Low (\$10,000) Potential source: RDBN, AGRI, NDIT
3.6 Expand food and agriculture activities in the region.		Medium	Ongoing	Existing Staff Time
Implementation considerations: a) Continue to support BCYA in the Land Matching Program to encourage new entrants.	L= BCYA S= RDBN ALUI	Medium	Ongoing	Existing Staff Time
b) Promote agriculture diversification and value-adding through RDBN website, displays at events and workshops.	L= RDBN S= AGRI, BNFFG	Medium	Ongoing	Low (\$3,000-\$10,000) Potential sources: RDBN, AGRI, NDIT



Photo credit: Janice Tapp

Priority Area 4: Engage a Broad Audience in Food and Agriculture Activities and Information

Many people in the RDBN have a deep appreciation for ranching, farming and where their food comes from. However, many people are not aware of the many roles that farmers and ranchers play in the RDBN. From providing ecological goods and services, to providing habitat for many types of wildlife, farmers are stewards of the land in addition to producing food. As indicated by the popularity of local agricultural fairs and farmers markets, the general public is keen to experience and learn about food and farming in the RDBN. On a practical level, people want to know more about where to buy regional products. Producers are also looking for more efficient ways to connect to regional, provincial, and world markets. Through raising the overall level of awareness and understanding of the food and farming sectors, the RDBN can help to facilitate a culture of abundance and appreciation that proudly recognizes the importance of food, farmers, and agriculture in the region.

Action Areas and Implementation Considerations to Address Priority 4

Priority Area 4: Engage a Broad Audience in Food and Agriculture Activities and Information				
Action Area and Implementation Considerations	Potential Lead and Support Roles	Urgency level	Timeframe	Resource requirements and Potential Sources
4.1 Continue to support and build relationships and networks around RDBN food and agriculture.	L = RDBN	Medium	Short and ongoing	Existing staff time
Implementation considerations: a) Continue networking with producers, producer associations and agriculture stakeholders.	L = RDBN	Medium	Short and ongoing	Existing staff time
b) Ensure agriculture representation in the Rural and Agriculture Committee of the RDBN.	L = RDBN	Medium	Short and ongoing	Existing staff time
c) Coordinate with producers to form their own association to gain strength in numbers.	L = RDBN, Producers S = AGRI	Medium	Short	Existing staff time
4.2 Promote sustainable agriculture practices.	L = RDBN	Medium	Short and ongoing	
Implementation considerations: a) Update and promote website content to include a range of best practices and success stories in implementing restorative, sustainable, and off-grid agriculture practices.	L = RDBN, Producers S =	Medium	Short and ongoing	Existing staff time
b) Develop enterprise budgets for commodity groups in the region and Northern BC that integrate sustainable agriculture practices.	L = RDBN S = UNBC	Medium	Medium	High (\$50,000-\$100,000) Potential sources: NDIT, IAF

Priority Area 4: Engage a Broad Audience in Food and Agriculture Activities and Information

Action Area and Implementation Considerations	Potential Lead and Support Roles	Urgency level	Timeframe	Resource requirements and Potential Sources
c) Promote participation in existing programs such as the Environmental Farm Plan program.	L = RDBN	Medium	Short and ongoing	Existing Staff time
d) Help to link producers to land and water stewardship programs and funding sources.	L = RDBN, AGRI, MoE, FLNRORD	Medium	Ongoing	Existing staff time
e) Advocate for opportunities, funding and programs which will enhance agriculture production, processing and distribution.	L = RDBN S = AGRI, IAF, NDIT	Medium	Ongoing	Existing staff time
f) Assist in the Vanderhoof area to enable the formation of a Vanderhoof Farmers Institute.	L = Producers, RDBN S = BCFI, BVFN	Medium	Medium	Existing staff time
4.3 Organize and host workshops, conferences, and producer events.	L = RDBN	Medium	Short and ongoing	Low to moderate
Implementation considerations: a) Organize regional agriculture forum(s) in consultation with other agriculture organizations to select complimentary times and agendas.	L = RDBN S = SFI, NVRCA, Producers	Medium	Short and ongoing	Moderate (\$40,000 - \$60,000) Potential sources: RDBN, AGRI, NDIT, Grants
b) In consultation with local organizations, plan and promote other events within the region (e.g. promoting farmers markets, water quality related field trips).	L = RDBN	Medium	Short and ongoing	Low (\$3,500 - \$7,500) Potential sources: RDBN, AGRI, Grants
c) Continue to provide small grants to support community events in the region.	L = RDBN	Medium	Long term	Low (\$10,000) Potential sources: RDBN
4.4 Continue to support youth in agriculture initiatives.				
Implementation consideration: a) Continue to promote school-based agriculture opportunities utilizing BC based agriculture education programs and special agriculture days.	L = PVCA, NVRCA, SD91, SD54 S = AITC, FSBC, RDBN	Medium	Ongoing	Existing Staff Time
b) Continue networking and assisting in specific youth agriculture projects.	L = BC4-H BVGB S = RDBN	Medium	Ongoing	Existing Staff Time

Priority Area 5: Prevent and Manage Invasive and Harmful Species

As identified in the 2012 RDBN Agriculture Plan and again by farmers and ranchers through the 2020 Plan update process, preventing and managing invasive and harmful species is an urgent need in the RDBN. Invasive species such as grasshoppers and hawkweed are spreading and continuing to sterilize farmland and other natural areas. Other species, such as Elk, are also causing harm and conflict on farms, especially when competing for food with herds and damaging fences. While species like Elk are native to the area and are an important part of a larger ecosystem, many ranchers and farmers are incurring hard-costs associated with their growth in population and are limited in their ability to manage the problem on-farm. As preventing and managing invasive and harmful species is an inter-sectoral, inter-governmental effort, continued vigilance in collaborating to fund strategic interventions to prevent and curb the expansion and impact of these species is a top priority for the RDBN.

Action Areas and Implementation Considerations to Address Priority 5

Priority Area 5: Prevent and Manage Invasive and Harmful Species				
Action Area and Implementation Considerations	Potential Lead and Support Roles	Urgency level	Timeframe	Resource requirements and Potential Sources
5.1 Advocate for and support collective efforts to prevent and manage invasive species.	L = RDBN	Medium	Short and ongoing	Low
Implementation considerations: a) Continue financial support to NWIPC and maintain RDBN staff person on the NWIPC committee.	L = RDBN S = NWIPC	Medium	Short and ongoing	Annual RDBN Budget,
b) Advocate for producers to have support from NWIPC for education, programs, etc. to manage/eradicate noxious weeds.	L = RDBN, NWIPC S = Producers	Medium	Short and ongoing	Low (\$2,500 - 5,000) Potential sources: RDBN, NWIPC, AGRI
c) Advocate and support NWIPC in working with Ministry of Transportation, CN and Hydro to manage noxious weeds.	L = RDBN, NWIPC	Medium	Short and ongoing	Negligible
5.2 Work with producers and senior levels of government to advocate for and create strategies to address on-farm challenges posed by wild animals.	L = RDBN	Medium	Short and ongoing	Negligible
Implementation considerations: a) Support producers in advocating to government to investigate the impact of increased elk and deer populations in the region affecting agriculture lands.	L = Producers, RDBN S = UBCM	Low	Short and ongoing	Negligible

Priority Area 5: Prevent and Manage Invasive and Harmful Species

Action Area and Implementation Considerations	Potential Lead and Support Roles	Urgency level	Timeframe	Resource requirements and Potential Sources
b) Support producers and FLNRORD in securing funding for predator fencing.	L = FLNRORD, producers S = RDBN	Medium	Short and ongoing	Negligible
c) Support producers in advocating to government to consider appropriate methods of population control in farming areas.	L = producers S = RDBN, UBCM	Low	Short and ongoing	Negligible
d) Advocate to other entities and government departments to better manage invasive species in non-RDBN jurisdictions (e.g. Ministry of Transportation, CN Rail, Pipeline ROWs, recreational areas).	L = RDBN	High	Short and ongoing	Negligible
5.3 Ensure that invasive species are prevented and managed on RDBN owned or managed lands.	L = RDBN	Medium	Medium and ongoing	TBD
Implementation Consideration: a) Identify any and all RDBN lands that contain invasive species and develop prevention and management strategies based on findings.	L = RDBN	Medium	Medium and ongoing	Moderate (\$40,000-\$50,000) Potential sources: RDBN, Grants
5.4 Encourage private landowners to prevent and manage invasive species.	L =RDBN	Medium	Medium and ongoing	
Implementation Considerations: a) Redevelop the homeowners rebate program and promote it effectively.	L = RDBN	Medium	Medium and ongoing	TBD
b) Identify potential to support special projects through external funding for containment and eradication.	L = RDBN	Medium	Medium and ongoing	TBD
5.5 Encourage private landowners to prevent and manage all weeds, noxious and native.				
a) Add to the RDBN website information on weeds and other hazardous items, such as water hemlock and blue green algae.	L = RDBN S = NWIPC	High	Ongoing	Existing staff time
b) Advocate producer support in events of livestock losses to noxious plants/blue green algae.	L =AGRI S = NWIPC, Producers, RDBN	Medium	Medium	Existing staff time

Priority Area 6: Ensure Agriculture Policies are In-Place and Consistent

In addition to the sector partner role that the RDBN has developed, the RDBN is also responsible for ensuring provincial and regional land use regulations are observed and enforced. These regulatory powers are given to the RDBN through the Local Government Act. At a regional level, the RDBN works to ensure that the seven Official Community Plans and Rural Community Plans in the region are consistent with Provincial and Regional land use policies and regulations. This helps to maintain fairness and predictability in managing land use in the ALR for future generations. Ensuring the protection of the agricultural land base as a non-renewable resource is an ongoing priority for the RDBN.

Action Areas and Implementation Considerations

Priority Area 6: Ensure Agriculture Policies are in-Place and Consistent				
Action Area and Implementation Considerations	Potential Lead and Support Roles	Urgency level	Timeframe	Resource requirements and Potential Sources
6.1. Continue to protect and preserve the Agricultural Land Reserve and soils having capability for agricultural purposes through the restriction of subdivision and limiting encroachment of non-farm uses.	L = RDBN, municipalities	Low	Ongoing	Negligible
Implementation consideration: a) Discourage exclusions from the ALR and subdivision within the ALR.	L = RDBN, municipalities	Low	Ongoing	Negligible
b) Support municipalities and rural areas to update statutory plans with ALC updates pertaining to agricultural lands in the region.	L = RDBN	Medium	Medium	Existing staff time
6.2 Continue to advocate to senior levels of government and industry around issues that impact RDBN producers.				
Implementation considerations: a) Continue to advocate and participate in ongoing discussions around key topics such as foreign and corporate ownership of farmland.	L = RDBN	Low	Ongoing	Existing staff time
b) Continue to monitor ALC updates and advocate for an outcome to the ALR review that will be supportive of producers in the region.	L = RDBN S = AGRI, ALC	Medium	Short and ongoing	Existing staff time

Priority Area 7: Increase Climate Change Resiliency

Climate change, extreme weather events, and changing patterns of heat and precipitation have a direct impact on the viability of food and agriculture sectors. The RDBN has been working to build capacity in order to respond to and recover from extreme events, although the pace of change seems to outstrip resources in place to fully respond. Protecting agriculture in the event of an extreme event is one element of climate change resiliency. Another, is reducing GHG emissions by removing organics from landfills. Developing and collaborating on a range of strategies to increase climate change resiliency in food and agriculture is a key priority for the RDBN.

Action Areas and Implementation Considerations to Address Priority 7

Priority Area 7: Increase Climate Change Resiliency				
Action Area and Implementation Considerations	Potential Lead and Support Roles	Urgency level	Timeframe	Resource requirements and Potential Sources
7.1 Continue to collaborate in implementing the BNFFG CAI Strategy.	L = RDBN	High to Medium	Short to Medium	Significant beyond 2023
Implementation considerations: a) Continue to support implementation projects.	L = RDBN, RDFFG, CAI	High	Short	Existing funding levels up to 2023
b) For 2023 & beyond, advocate for funding projects not achieved in first funding round and/or secondary projects.	L = RDBN, RDFFG, CAI	Medium	Medium	Significant (\$150,000 - \$300,000) Potential sources: CAP
7.2 Increase climate risk mitigation and adaptation for agriculture lands.	L = RDBN	High	Short and ongoing	Existing
Implementation considerations: a) Integrate RDBN Protective Services, including agriculture producers, in risk mitigation and adaptation projects, such as HRVA.	L = RDBN	High	Short and ongoing	Existing
b) Advocate for agriculture producers to allow risk mitigation on crown lands adjacent to agriculture lands.	L = RDBN, RDFFG, CAI S = UBCM	Medium	Short and ongoing	Existing
7.3 Reduce organic and plastic agricultural waste in the landfill.	L = RDBN	High	Short and ongoing	Existing staff time
Implementation considerations: a) Continue education producers and encourage alternate uses for agriculture plastic waste.	L = RDBN	High	Short and ongoing	Existing Staff time
b) Explore and possibly assist in development of agriculture plastic recycling initiative.	L = RDBN S = Producers NDIT	Medium	Short and ongoing	Low Existing staff time Project funded outside of RDBN budgets

Priority Area 7: Increase Climate Change Resiliency

Action Area and Implementation Considerations	Potential Lead and Support Roles	Urgency level	Timeframe	Resource requirements and Potential Sources
c) Promote agriculture composters to abattoirs to reduce offal waste and predator attraction at Regional landfills.	L = RDBN	Medium	Short	Negligible Possible grant funding from Organics Infrastructure Program
d) Provide information and materials, such as waste guides, to clarify what is acceptable for disposal by means of recycling and landfilling. For example, promoting information on the existing bylaws that prohibit industrial waste (i.e. harvested material) at the landfill.	L = RDBN	Medium	Short	Negligible Possible grant funding from Organics Infrastructure Program
e) Encourage on-farm composting of organic waste.	L = RDBN	Medium	Short	Low Existing staff time



Priority Area 8: Continue to Build Capacity for Effective and Strategic Implementation

A Food and Agriculture Plan is only as good as how well it is used, implemented, and updated. The effective implementation of this Food and Agriculture Plan relies on keeping this plan up to date, staff expertise and time, funding, and good data. The RDBN has focused on creating an action-oriented Agriculture Plan that will help to guide budgeting and priority setting for elected officials and staff. For example, the RDBN has already normalized the Agriculture Coordinator staff position, that begun as a two-year pilot project funded by NDIT. This position will provide critical momentum and capacity behind implementing this Plan, in turn making some real, on-the-ground positive impacts for producers and the food and agriculture sectors as a whole. Being able to *Walk the Talk* and use this Plan to make positive changes for producers is a key priority for the RDBN.

Action Areas and Implementation Considerations to Address Priority 8

Priority Area 8: Continue to build capacity for effective and strategic implementation				
Action Area and Implementation Considerations	Potential Lead and Support Roles	Urgency level	Timeframe	Resource requirements and Potential Sources
8.1 Update the RDBN Food and Agriculture Plan every 5-7 years.	L = RDBN	Low	Medium	Moderate (\$30,000-\$50,000) Potential sources: RDBN
Implementation Consideration: a) Update <i>Foundations Report</i> with new Agriculture Census Data (Forthcoming, 2022).	L = RDBN	Low	Medium	Moderate (\$30,000-\$50,000) Potential sources: RDBN
b) Conduct impact assessments to understand the changes occurring as a result of strategic interventions. Use this information to update the Food and Agriculture Plan. Use multiple sources of quantitative and qualitative data.	L = RDBN	Low	Long	Moderate (\$30,000-\$50,000) Potential sources: RDBN
8.2 Maintain the Agriculture Coordinator Position.	L = RDBN	Low	Medium	Moderate
Implementation Consideration: a) Consider collaborating with NDIT to establish a pilot staff position in Non Timber Forest Products that can work alongside the RDBN Agriculture Coordinator.	L = RDBN	Low	Medium	Moderate Potential sources: RDBN, NDIT

Priority Area 8: Continue to build capacity for effective and strategic implementation

Action Area and Implementation Considerations	Potential Lead and Support Roles	Urgency level	Timeframe	Resource requirements and Potential Sources
8.3 Compile and consolidate quantitative and qualitative data on food systems and agriculture in the RDBN.	L= RDBN	Medium	Medium	Negligible to moderate
Implementation Consideration: a) Encourage AGRI to update ALUIs in Smithers and Vanderhoof to enable trend analysis and year to year comparisons.	L= AGRI	Medium	Medium	Negligible
b) Update RDBN Food and Agriculture Plan and Foundations report with new Census of Agriculture data (Forthcoming 2021).	L= RDBN	Medium	Medium	Moderate (\$10,000) Potential sources: RDBN
c) Continue to monitor any conversion of farmland to permitted non-farm uses such as silviculture and agritourism.	L = RDBN	Medium	Short and ongoing	Existing staff time
8.4 Continue to be a learning organization.	L= RDBN	Medium	Ongoing	Existing staff time
Implementation considerations: a) Continue to actively engage in creating an understanding of UNDRIP. Assist and encourage ways of working with First Nation communities. b) Consider how the RDBN can support and facilitate the implementation of UNDRIP.				



Implementation Strategy

The implementation strategy offered below reconfigures the priorities and actions into three phases: Phase 1 (2020-2023), Phase 2 (2020-2025), and Phase 3 (2020-2030). Within each phase, the most urgent actions are listed at the top, with medium or lower urgency actions towards the bottom of each phase. This implementation strategy is intended to support next steps for elected officials and staff.

The numeration of each of the actions corresponds to the priorities and action tables in the above sections.

PHASE 1: 2020-2023

Priority Area 1: Support Producers in Navigating Government Policies	1.1 Develop a communication strategy to disseminate information to producers on government regulations affecting agriculture.
Priority Area 1: Support Producers in Navigating Government Policies	1.2 Create and disseminate producer-focused tools to support clarity with the multiple levels of government regulation.
Priority Area 2: Prepare for Emergencies	2.1 Update and publish RDBN Agriculture Emergency Preparedness Information.
Priority Area 2: Prepare for Emergencies	2.3 In the event of emergency, activate Agriculture Emergency plan within regional EOC in events involving agriculture.
Priority Area 2: Prepare for Emergencies	2.4 Strengthen responses for recovery from emergency events impacting agriculture.
Priority Area 3: Develop the RDBN Food and Agriculture Sector and Market(s)	3.1 Advocate for and facilitate access to affordable shavings and hay.
Priority Area 3: Develop the RDBN Food and Agriculture Sector and Market(s)	3.3 Undertake a food hub feasibility study and a regional food economy assessment.
Priority Area 5: Prevent and Manage Invasive and Harmful Species	5.5 Encourage private landowners to prevent and manage all weed, noxious and native.
Priority Area 7: Increase Climate Change Resiliency	7.2 Increase climate risk mitigation and adaptation for agriculture lands.
Priority Area 7: Increase Climate Change Resiliency	7.3 Reduce organic and plastic agricultural waste in the landfill.

PHASE 2: 2020-2025

Priority Area 2: Prepare for Emergencies

2.2 Strengthen livestock emergency preparedness.

Priority Area 2: Prepare for Emergencies

2.5 Identify regional risk mitigation projects to assist producers.

Priority Area 3: Develop the RDBN Food and Agriculture Sector and Market(s)

3.2 Continue to update and distribute the Connecting Producers and Consumers Guide annually

Priority Area 3: Develop the RDBN Food and Agriculture Sector and Market(s)

3.6 Expand food and agriculture activities in the region

Priority Area 4: Engage a Broad Audience in Food and Agriculture Activities and Information

4.1 Continue to support and build relationships and networks around RDBN food and agriculture.

Priority Area 4: Engage a Broad Audience in Food and Agriculture Activities and Information

4.2 Promote sustainable agriculture practices.

Priority Area 4: Engage a Broad Audience in Food and Agriculture Activities and Information

4.3 Organize and host workshops, conferences, and producer events.

Priority Area 4: Engage a Broad Audience in Food and Agriculture Activities and Information

4.4 Continue to support youth in agriculture initiatives.

Priority Area 5: Prevent and Manage Invasive and Harmful Species

5.1 Advocate for and support collective efforts to prevent and manage invasive species.

Priority Area 5: Prevent and Manage Invasive and Harmful Species

5.2 Work with producers and senior levels of government to advocate for and create strategies to address on-farm challenges posed by wild animals.

8.4 Continue to be a learning organization.

PHASE 3: 2020-2030

Priority Area 7: Increase Climate Change Resiliency	7.1 Continue to collaborate in implementing the BNFFG CAI Strategy.
Priority Area 3: Develop the RDBN Food and Agriculture Sector and Market(s)	3.5 Develop an overall marketing plan and supportive print and online communication materials for promoting RDBN food and agriculture.
Priority Area 5: Prevent and Manage Invasive and Harmful Species	5.3 Ensure that invasive species are prevented and managed on RDBN owned or managed lands.
Priority Area 5: Prevent and Manage Invasive and Harmful Species	5.4 Encourage private landowners to prevent and manage invasive species.
Priority Area 6: Ensure Agriculture Policies are in-Place and Consistent	6.2 Continue to advocate to senior levels of government and industry around issues that impact RDBN producers.
Priority Area 8: Continue to build capacity for effective and strategic implementation	8.3 Compile and consolidate quantitative and qualitative data on food systems and agriculture in the RDBN.
Priority Area 3: Develop the RDBN Food and Agriculture Sector and Market(s)	3.4 Undertake specific product market studies to better understand emerging opportunities.
Priority Area 8: Continue to build capacity for effective and strategic implementation	8.1 Update the RDBN Food and Agriculture Plan every 5-7 years.
Priority Area 8: Continue to build capacity for effective and strategic implementation	8.2 Maintain the Agriculture Coordinator Position.
Priority Area 6: Ensure Agriculture Policies are in-Place and Consistent	6.1. Continue to protect and preserve the Agricultural Reserve and soils having capability for agricultural purposes through the restriction of subdivision and limiting encroachment of non-farm uses.