



AGRICULTURE AND THE AGRICULTURE LAND RESERVE:

A POSITION STATEMENT OF THE BC AGRICULTURE COUNCIL

The BCAC supports the principle of the Agriculture Land Reserve as a vital tool to provide a viable climate in which to operate our industry.

It must be recognized that the single most important factor in preserving farmland is to preserve the farmer by ensuring that a comprehensive economic and regulatory framework exists that supports viable farm operations for good farm owners and managers.

While Agriculture in general is continuously modifying its practices to meet expectations of consumers and demands from the environmental lobby, the preservation of farm land is intrinsically linked to the ability of the producer to make a living and prosper.

The reasons to support the Agriculture Land Reserve and the industry are many:

1. Economic Contribution:

The agriculture sector in BC makes a substantial contribution to the economy of the Province:

- With more than 20,000 farms and over 1100 food processing industries, the agriculture and agrifood sector provides direct employment for over 54,000 people and generates over \$2.3 billion in farm cash receipts.
- The total value of the industry from producer to consumer (from “farm to fork”) is over \$19 billion and provides total employment to over 267,000 British Columbians.
- Agriculture is a stabilizing factor in many rural and regional communities. The industry has maintained stability, employment, and economic activity in these areas.

2. Food Security:

The ALR provides for security of food supply. At present agriculture in BC produces about 50 percent of the food consumed in the province. With the continued increase in the population base and the loss of production capacity we are at risk of becoming increasingly dependent on imports to secure adequate nutrition for the population.

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Preservation of productive agricultural land through the means of the Agriculture Land Reserve (ALR), coupled with an array of regulatory and economic incentive tools, will ensure that the agriculture sector will be in a position to meet the demands of a continuously growing population.

3. Environmental Benefits:

Farmland provides important aesthetic and environmental value. Agricultural land is seen to provide a separation between adjoining communities, to limit suburban sprawl and to contribute to cleaner air, biodiversity, and fish values. This benefit accrues mostly to the urban and suburban populations of the Lower Mainland, the Islands and the Okanagan, but can still be considered a contribution to the public good.

4. Land Base is a Scarce Resource:

Only 5.0% of BC's land is suitable for agriculture. 80% of BC residents live in or adjacent to agricultural areas that are responsible for 78% of BC's farm revenues.

Specific Complementary Policy Requirements to Maintain Support for the ALR:

In addition to the need for a comprehensive provincial agri-food policy that ensures the competitiveness and viability of the sector, a number of specific policy requirements must be in place in order for the industry to continue to support the ALR:

1. Government commitment to the Farm Practices Protection Act and the principles of "right to farm legislation." Producers have to be protected from 'nuisance' lawsuits by residential or special interests.
2. Approvals for exclusion of property from the ALR must include specific measures to mitigate impact on adjacent farm properties. These measures must be implemented on the non-ALR side of the boundary and must be meaningful and strictly enforced as a condition of approval.
3. Where producers are forced to alter normal farm practices as a result of government direction in response to residential interest, producers will have to be compensated for the loss of income on an ongoing basis and/or be provided financial support for capital costs for the changes.
4. Strong local government support for the industry including a commitment to the industry through agriculture plans, effective agriculture advisory committees with representation determined by local producer associations, planning processes and local government bylaws that are consistent with agriculture viability.



Focus for Economic Development Needs:

At present there is still land in the land reserve, which has no potential for the production of any crops. Applicants for exclusion from the ALR for economic development needs near population centers should focus on these properties.

Conclusion

To preserve the Agricultural production base, the maintenance of the Agriculture Land Reserve is crucial for both the agricultural producers and the population at large. However, this alone will not guarantee the viability of the agriculture sector.

A combination of appropriate government policies (Farm Practices Protection Act, etc.), support programs consistent with our trade obligations (EFPs, business risk management insurance) are needed to insure that the sector can provide a reasonable income to all producers.

The agriculture sector is, among its many other functions, the steward of the ALR and needs to be supported by Government and the Public in this role.