

STATE OF THE AGRICULTURAL LAND RESERVE





AGRICULTURE IN BC: A PROVINCIAL TREASURE

Introduction

Farming works for British Columbia. Famous for rugged mountains and a spectacular coastline, BC is also blessed with small areas of highly productive agricultural land. The province's agricultural industry, reflecting its landscape, is characterised by diversity. The Okanagan is renowned for orchards and vineyards while the Lower Mainland hosts some of the most advanced greenhouse operations in the world; the bucolic Comox Valley supports successful dairy farms just as the rolling plains of the Peace River district are home to wheat fields that are the envy of pasta aficionados. Farming in the province generates income, creates jobs and contributes to food security. Agricultural land is critical to the health of rural and urban areas, can provide ecological benefits, and often defines the very character of B.C. communities.

Economy ¹

With more than 20,000 working farms and 1,150 food-processing industries, BC's agriculture sector employed 25,900 British Columbians and generated over \$2.3 billion in farm gate receipts in 2001. All of this activity and productivity, accounting for 1% of our GDP, occurs on less than 5% of the provincial land base.

The Lower Mainland region is a key source of agricultural income and jobs. In the Fraser Valley Regional District, for example, 2,660 farms occupy 48,760 hectares and in 2001 earned almost \$736 million – 32% of the provincial total. Farming is also an important economic driver in the Okanagan, where it generates almost \$263 million in farm gate receipts each year; on Vancouver Island, where farming pays more than \$30 million in wages; and in the Northeast, our province's grain producing "bread basket", where 6.5% of the labour force is directly employed in agriculture.



¹ Ministry of Agriculture Food and Fisheries (2003) Fast Stats: Agriculture and Food, 2002 Victoria: Statistical Services, BCMAFF



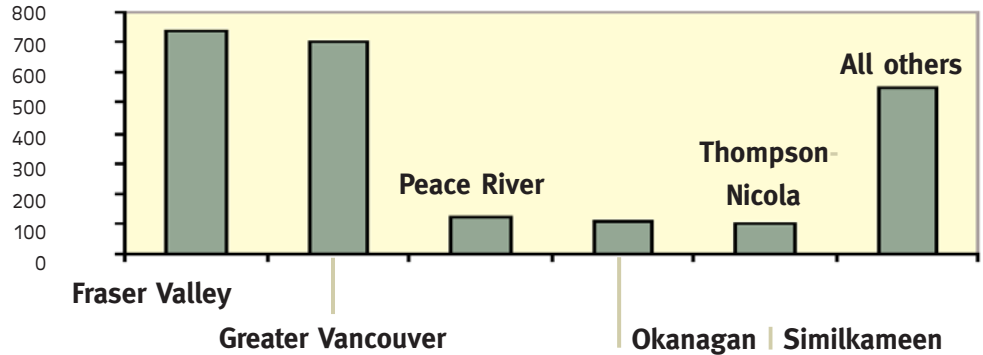
BC Farming at a Glance

Year	Hectares farmed	# of farms	Gross receipts
1986	2,411,060	19,063	\$1,058,986,568
2001	2,587,118	20,290	\$2,307,697,089

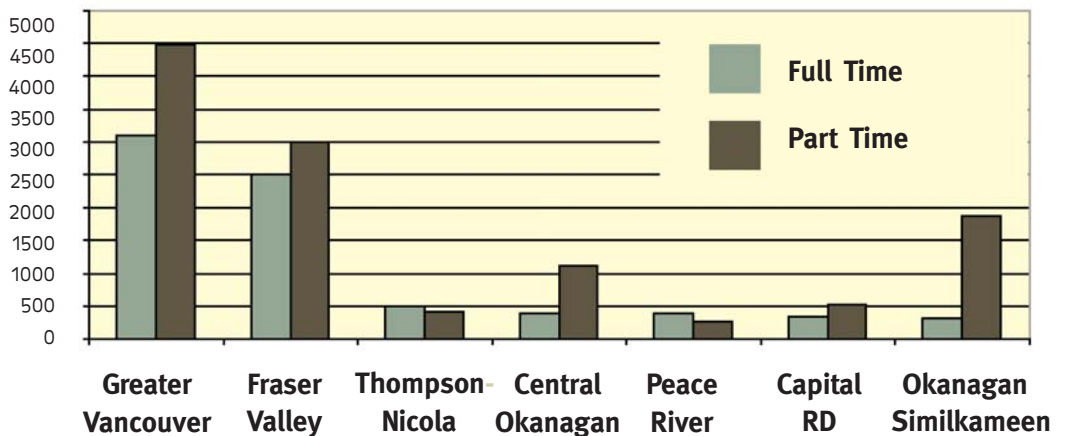
Gross Farm Receipts
Top Five Municipalities
2000

Abbotsford	\$452 million
Langley (Township)	\$203 million
Chilliwack	\$185 million
Surrey	\$181 million
Delta	\$161 million

Gross Farm Receipts
by Regional District
2001 (\$ millions)



Jobs in Agriculture
2001





Our agricultural land reserve provides for 50% of British Columbia's food needs off of less than 5% of our land base.

Food Security ²

The range of crops and livestock found on BC farms would make most areas of the world envious. Together these products meet more than 50% of our provincial food needs and provide British Columbians with many choices for a healthy, locally grown diet. Provincial food sources reduce our dependence on external markets, provide higher quality, fresh products and reduce the huge amount of energy needed to truck our food from faraway lands.

Though less than 0.01% ³ of the soil is suitable for their production, tree fruits are among BC's best known foods. In 2001 the province's farmers devoted 5,982 hectares of land to apple orchards, yielding nearly 150,000,000 kg of apples. That's enough to feed the apple diet of 13,226,740 Canadians!

Meanwhile, BC produced enough potatoes for about 700,000 Canadians, milk for 11.2 million and eggs for 4.2 million of our fellow citizens. Our farmers also grew 13 million kg of grapes in 2001, helping to support our national wine consumption of about 9 litres per person per year. Of course, not all of these products stay here: BC also produces about 8% of Canada's international agri-food exports. While technological innovations and economic transitions reduce our dependence on primary resource extraction, we still have to eat! Committing to a strong local food-growing industry is a sound investment for today and tomorrow.

BC's Contribution to National Production

In 2001 B.C. accounted for only 3.8% of Canada's land in farm use but generated over 7% of Canada's gross farm receipts and led the nation in the production of a number of commodities.

Commodity	Percentage BC Share of Canada's Gross Farm Receipts	National Ranking
Sweet Cherries	81.0	1
Greenhouse Peppers	68.3	1
Raspberries	61.2	1
Blueberries	40.2	1
Ginseng	41.8	2
Cranberries	33.9	2
Nursery	31.8	2
Grapes	30.6	2
Mushrooms	28.4	2
Greenhouse Tomatoes	27.6	2
Floriculture	21.9	2
Apples	21.3	2

² ibid

³ Quayle, Moura (1998) Stakes in the Ground: Provincial Interest in the Agricultural Land Commission Act <http://www.agf.gov.bc.ca/polleg/quayle/stakes.htm>

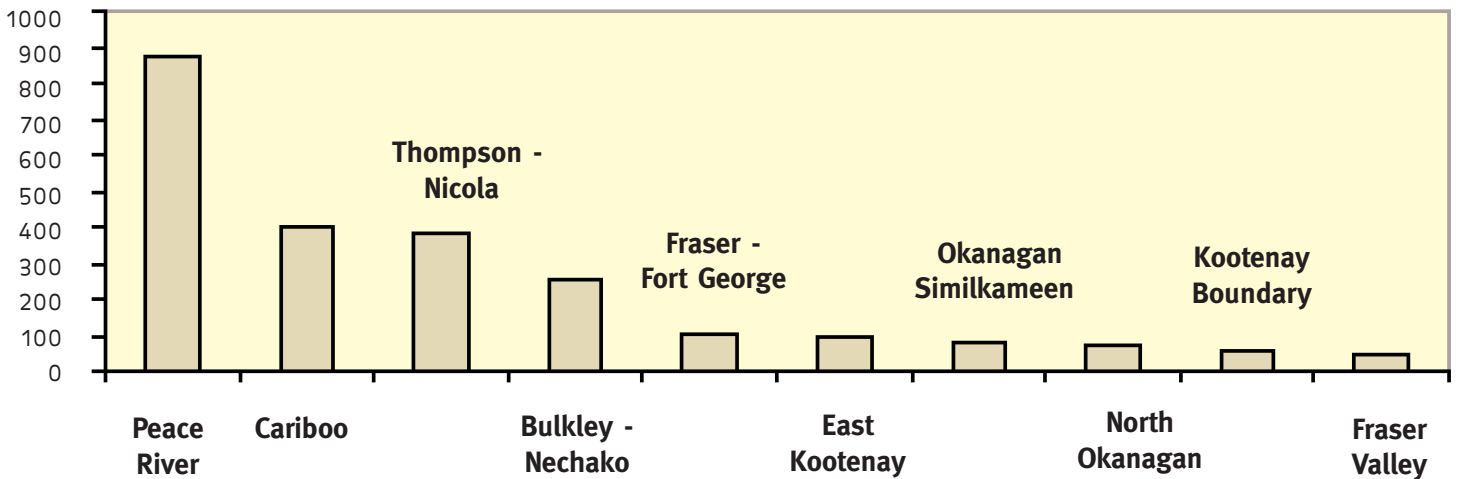


BC's renowned dairy operations require parcels of at least 25 ha. A recent Ministry of Agriculture farmland inventory in Abbotsford reveals that there are no unfarmed parcels available for the expansion of this industry.

Landscape ⁴

BC's diverse agricultural landscape includes tiny hobby farms, intense organic horticultural operations, verdant dairy pastures and vast ranches. In addition to their primary role for crops and livestock agricultural lands have ecological and aesthetic values as habitat and greenspace. The Town of Oliver, home to 10% of Canada's wineries and 20% of the country's fine grape acreage, is capitalizing on these values by marketing itself as the "Wine Capital of Canada". In Richmond, with 25% of our nation's cranberry acreage, and in Abbotsford, where almost half of Canada's raspberry lands are found, agriculture is a similarly defining feature of the local landscape. Certain agricultural uses, such as greenhouse and mushroom production, occupy a comparatively small land area but can generate significant farm income. Other operations, such as cattle ranches and grain production, require large areas for low intensity activities. All types of farming play an important role in our economy, environment and food supply.

Area Farmed by Regional District
2001 (thousands of ha)



⁴ Ministry of Agriculture Food and Fisheries (2003) Growing Together Vol.4, #1



Our ALR is recognized internationally as a progressive and effective tool for farmland protection.

THE ALR: LEGISLATION WITH VISION

Overview

A secure and protected land base is fundamental to the long-term viability of BC agriculture and livable communities. More than three decades ago the provincial government responded to concerns about the annual loss of 6,000 hectares of prime farmland by introducing legislation to create the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR). The Land Commission Act established the ALR as a provincial zone in which agriculture is the priority use, farming is encouraged and non-farm use is restricted. Since its inception in 1974, the ALR has protected 4.7 million hectares of agricultural land through careful consideration of applications for alterations to ALR boundaries, subdivisions, or non-farm use of ALR land. Though its boundaries have changed over time the size of the Reserve, which covers approximately 5% of the province, has remained the same.



ALR Land in British Columbia

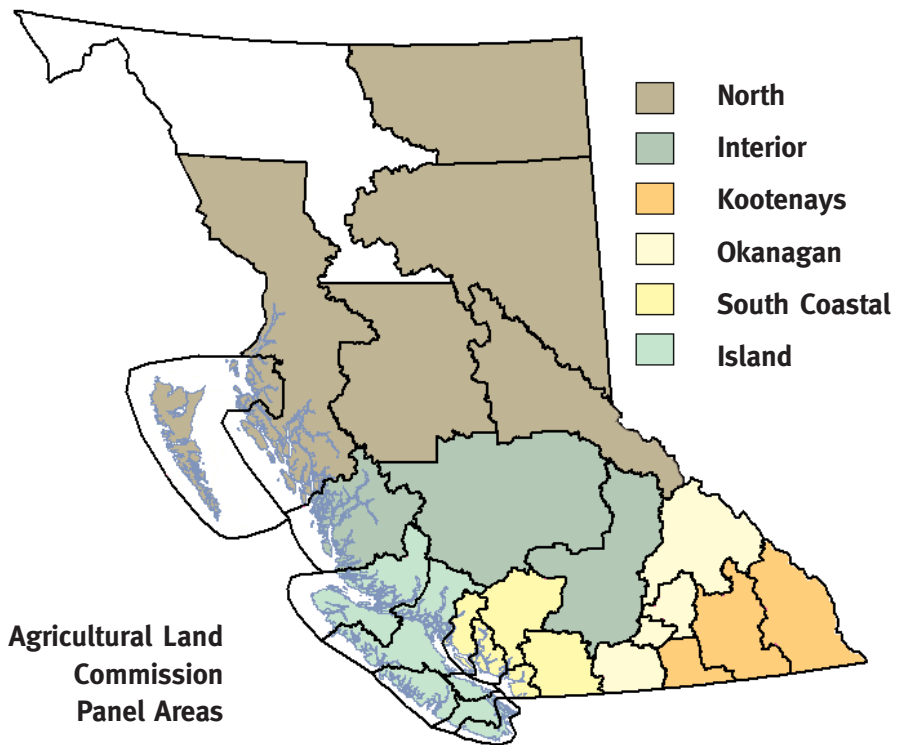




The Agricultural Land Commission is now a collection of six panels rather than a province-wide body.

Consistent mandate, changing structure

Authority for land use decisions in the ALR rests with an independent Crown Agency: the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC). Throughout its 30-year history, the Commission’s purpose has been to preserve agricultural land and support farming. As well as reviewing applications, the Commission works with local governments, First Nations and other agencies to help ensure land use plans and growth strategies encourage agriculture and preserve BC’s scarce farmland resource. In 2002, the Commission undertook its most recent reorganisation in an effort to “improve responsiveness, increase interaction with applicants and stakeholders, provide the opportunity for increased regional presence, increase decision-making efficiency, and increase opportunity for delegation”⁵. Originally a single provincial body, the Commission now comprises a chair, executive committee, and six regional panels. Each three-member panel reviews and makes decisions regarding all applications affecting ALR lands in their region.



⁵ Agricultural Land Commission 2004 Commission Panels alc.gov.bc.ca/commission/commission_panels.htm



A secure land base

Viable farming requires land. A successful agricultural operation makes significant and ongoing capital investments to ensure productivity, product quality and a return on investments. To justify these business decisions and agricultural investments, farmers need their farmland for farming, not as a reserve for future urban or suburban development. Without a clear mechanism for its protection, agricultural land is subject to real estate speculation. Speculation artificially inflates land values and urban/rural conflicts may intensify to the extent that farming is no longer viable. The ALR is an effective means to protect farmland in perpetuity and can be a catalyst for community planning initiatives that facilitate the healthy interaction of urban and rural activities.

Two regions of our province – the South Coast and Okanagan – cover just 2.7% of our land base, but are home to 81% of our population (2001) and 81% of our annual gross farm receipts (2000)!



The success of farming is based in the availability of arable land.





Cost of Community Services studies consistently show farmland to be a net contributor to municipal tax revenues while the heavy infrastructure of residential subdivisions costs more than these areas generate in taxes.

Urban innovation

By protecting land and encouraging agriculture, the ALR supports farms and farming communities. It contributes to a healthy agricultural economy and supports the provision of local food sources while encouraging adjacent urban areas to use land more efficiently. Research and practice in town planning emphasizes the advantages of incorporating a variety of activities within a limited footprint, in contrast to the high costs of low-density, single-use neighbourhoods⁶. By establishing a de facto growth boundary the ALR reduces infrastructure and servicing costs for new development; encourages vibrant town centres that support local businesses and offer accessible neighbourhood services for residents; and protects greenspace networks that allow citizens to enjoy the features of a farmed landscape⁷.

Compared to agriculture and open space, new residential developments are a significant financial burden to local authorities. Providing road, water, sewer and school services to housing subdivisions costs municipalities more than they earn from residential tax revenues. On the other hand, agricultural land uses generate about \$1 for every \$0.35 it costs to service them^{viii}. This Cost of Community Service analysis – one method for evaluating development decisions – shows that while farming is not a significant generator of tax revenue, its minimal servicing requirements result in a cost-benefit equation comparable to commercial and industrial developments.

A comparison of Vancouver and Seattle, both large and growing cities, illustrates a marked difference in development patterns and attests to the power of an urban growth boundary. Where the ALR has helped Vancouver to preserve the open space of a working agricultural landscape through concentrated growth, Seattle’s appetite for sprawling development has gone relatively unchecked, replacing green areas with low-density single-use suburbs. While many downtowns witness decay, Vancouver’s central city has consistently attracted new investment and job opportunities while offering easy access to shopping, parks and other amenities.

⁶ Burchell, RW et al (2002) The Costs of Sprawl – 2000 Washington: National Academy of Science Press; Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation Infrastructure Costs Associated with Conventional and Alternative Development Patterns Research Highlights, Socio-Economic Series, Issue 26

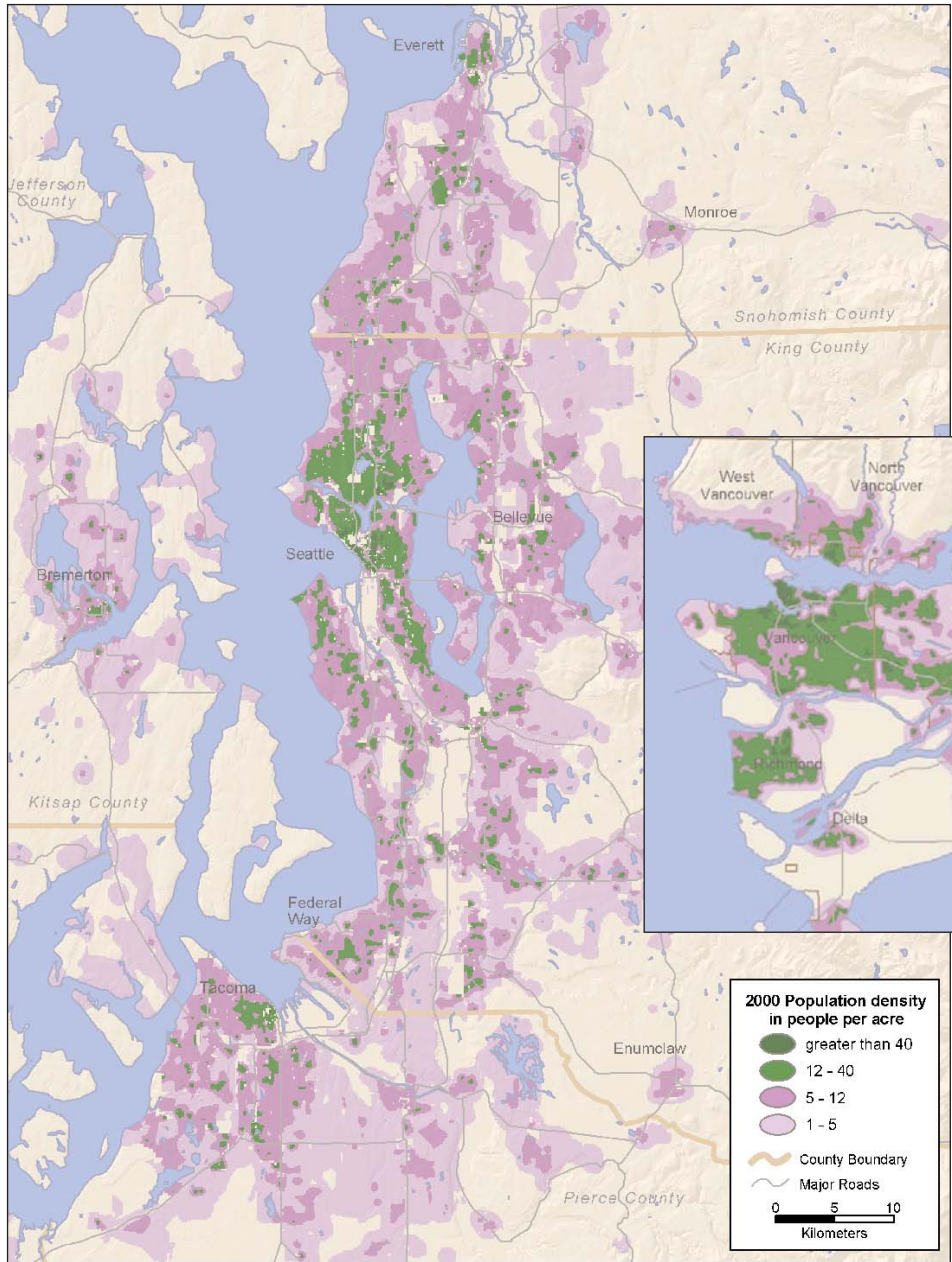
⁷ Barnston Island, in the Fraser River, is a working agricultural landscape and a popular recreation destination for families

⁸ Heimlich, RE & W Anderson 2001 Development at the Urban Fringe and Beyond: Impacts on Agricultural and Rural Land Washington: Economic Research Service, US Department of Agriculture, see also American Farmland Trust (2002) Fact Sheet: Cost of Community Services. Washington.

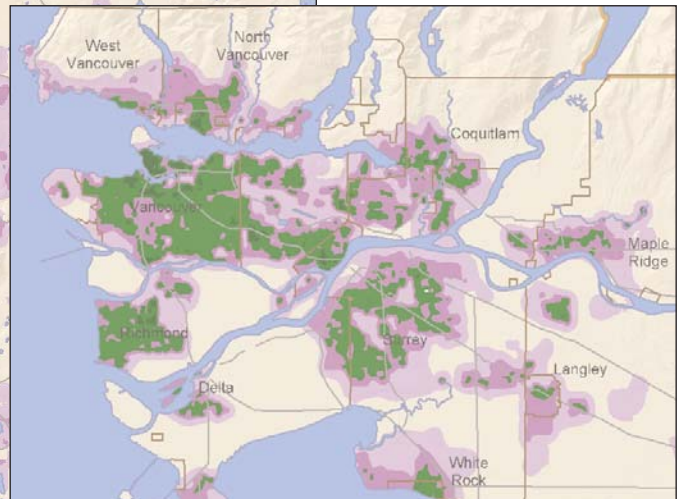




Seattle-Tacoma, WA



Vancouver, BC



A comparison of Seattle and Vancouver shows the success of containment boundaries in creating more compact communities.



Residents of BC have to remain vigilant to protect farmland from urban development.

Threats

While British Columbians enjoy the many features of a secure agricultural land base, they should also be vigilant to ensure its ongoing protection. Our finite supply of agricultural land is subject to pressure for conversion to a host of other uses. With the highest proportion of urban dwellers in Canada, BC's cities and towns are also bullish neighbours to the most productive growing regions. Planning policies and population growth demanding residential, commercial and industrial developments in new areas often target farmland. History teaches us that absent a strong commitment to its preservation, this precious and scarce resource is sentenced to a slow, piecemeal, but inevitable demise.

Key Population Growth Areas and Farm Receipts

Regional District	Population growth 1971-2001	Share of BC population growth	Gross farm receipts (2000)	Share of BC farm receipts (2000)
Greater Vancouver	906,250	52.60%	\$698,053,467	30.20%
Fraser Valley	148,974	8.70%	\$735,859,984	31.90%
Capital	122,167	7.10%	\$50,317,248	2.20%
Central Okanagan	92,736	5.30%	\$74,887,598	3.30%
Nanaimo	79,481	4.60%	\$16,612,719	0.70%
Total	1,349,608	78.30%	\$1,575,731,016	68.30%





30 years after its inception the ALR faces pressures that will potentially erode BC's agricultural land base, undermine the farming economy, and compromise one of North America's most effective tools for protecting farmland and limiting urban sprawl. The Land Commission's new structure and service plan mandate to be regionally responsive and consider community needs have been accompanied by an increase in applications from local governments and private interests to subdivide farmland, undertake non-farm uses, and exclude land from the ALR. The consideration of community needs is particularly troubling when communities have not defined their needs in the context of farmland preservation or developed supportive agricultural policies.

New ALR Applications Submitted

Region	Year	Month						Sub							Total
		J	F	M	A	M	J		J	A	S	O	N	D	
Interior	2004	1	3	3	2	2	3	14							14
	2003	3	2	2	0	5	7	19	7	1	3	4	2	4	40
Island	2004	6	6	16	6	8	12	54							54
	2003	5	5	4	5	6	10	35	7	5	6	2	6	6	67
Kootenay	2004	4	2	4	3	5	5	23							23
	2003	2	2	3	3	3	7	20	4	1	4	1	6	6	42
North	2004	10	13	14	8	11	9	65							45
	2003	3	2	8	9	8	10	40	7	5	8	5	6	7	78
Okanagan	2004	10	7	10	7	9	9	52							52
	2003	9	11	18	10	12	10	70	7	2	10	7	5	11	112
South Coast	2004	5	3	13	12	11	20	64							64
	2003	6	5	7	4	7	21	50	7	7	6	13	3	2	88
Totals	2004	36	34	60	38	46	58	272							272
	2003	28	27	42	31	41	65	234	39	21	37	32	28	36	427





To maintain a high quality of life, communities across BC need to plan for their agricultural future just as they plan for their urban future.

PLANNING FOR AGRICULTURE

Working together for working lands

The Agricultural Land Commission Act takes precedence over, but does not replace local government regulations. As a result, authority for land use decisions is shared and it is important that planning agencies and the communities they represent work together for farmland protection. To this end the Land Commission is clearly instructed, “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.”⁹ Examples of common strategies include Agricultural Area Plans, Agricultural Advisory Committees, and Edge Planning.

Agricultural Area Plans

Consistent with provincial legislation and actual landscape conditions, local governments can designate agriculture uses within an entire region or municipality. Just as local area and neighbourhood plans provide more detailed policies addressing urban or settlement areas, agricultural area plans (AAPs) concentrate on farmland and food production. An AAP reflects applicable official community plans, defines the role of farming within the community, usually involves farmers as partners in the plan, focuses attention on key local agriculture issues and promotes policy integration across jurisdictions and levels of government.



⁹ Agricultural Land Commission (2004) About the Commission www.alc.gov.bc.ca/commission/alc_main.htm



Agricultural Area Plans

There are 11 agricultural area plans in BC right now and more communities are embracing this important planning tool.

Jurisdiction	Plan Name	Year
Township of Langley	Langley Rural Plan	1993
Districts of Saanich, Central Saanich, North Saanich and the Town of Sidney	Agriculture Strategy for the Saanich Peninsula	1997
City of Kelowna	Agriculture Plan –	1998
City of Chilliwack	Agricultural Sector Strategy for the District of Chilliwack	1999
City of Surrey	Surrey Agricultural Plan	1999
District of Pitt Meadows	The Future of Agriculture	2000
District of North Cowichan	Strategic Agricultural Plan	2001
City of Richmond	Richmond Agricultural Viability Strategy	2003
Regional District of Comox-Strathcona	Comox Valley Agriculture Plan	2003
City of Penticton	Agricultural Plan	2004 (in progress)
District of Salmon Arm	Agricultural Area Plan -	2004 (in progress)



Agricultural Advisory Committees help provide decision makers with the advice they need to ensure the long term vitality of agriculture.

Agricultural Advisory Committees

The development of an effective plan for agriculture implies the participation of people outside government offices! In planning for the protection of agricultural land and supporting farm businesses, elected officials and their staff require input from citizens and especially farmers – the experts in many decisions. An Agricultural Advisory Committee (AAC) provides a formal and ongoing venue for the farming community to advise local councils and regional boards and assume a central role in designing plans, policies and by-laws affecting farming and agricultural land. Common initiatives in rural and urban agricultural communities, from residential subdivisions to recreational trails, benefit from early and ongoing involvement of local food producers. Working on a specific policy or providing general advice, AACs have proven effective in diverse communities from the Creston Valley to the Town of Sydney.

AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY COMMITTEES

(as of August 2004)

- City of Abbotsford
- Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District
- City of Chilliwack
- Comox-Strathcona Regional District
- Fraser Valley Regional District
- Greater Vancouver Regional District
- Islands Trust – Saltspring Island
- Central Kootenay Regional District
- Creston Valley AAC
 - Electoral Area I & J (Castlegar Area) AAC
 - Electoral Area E (Blewett Area) AAC
- East Kootenay Regional District
 - Electoral Areas B and C AAC
- Central Okanagan Regional District
- City of Kelowna
- District of Kent
- Township of Langley
- Peace River Regional District
- Peninsula Agricultural Commission
 - District of Saanich
 - District of Central Saanich
 - District of North Saanich
 - Town of Sidney
- City of Penticton
- District of Pitt Meadows
- City of Richmond
- Squamish Lillooet Regional District
 - Pemberton Valley AAC
- City of Surrey



Careful planning along the ALR border is key to ensuring that urban and farm conflict does not escalate to the point where farming is no longer viable.

Edge Planning

The rural/urban or farm/non-farm interface is the most important planning area in support of the ALR. Without special attention to places where the town meets the country, land use conflicts ranging from discomfort and vandalism to polluted irrigation water are inevitable. The result – frustrated farmers and disgruntled neighbours – is no recipe for a vibrant local farm economy and in some cases can spell the decline of agriculture. On the other hand, careful edge planning supports farming for the long term while creating attractive and livable settlement areas adjacent to agricultural land.

Edge planning challenges the notion that encroachment onto rural lands is an inescapable fact of urban growth by making the ALR boundary more than a just a line on a map. The first step is to minimise the interface by keeping urban developments within existing areas. Where edges exist, physical planning tools include landscape buffers on the urban side of the interface, effective fencing standards, streamside protection measures, and appropriate and sensitive road alignments for new subdivisions. Policy tools include Development Permit Areas for the protection of farming and Farm By-laws.





Complaints about farm issues have been reduced substantially since the City of Surrey placed notices of farming activity on the land title of parcels adjacent to farmland.

Restrictive covenants

Individual land holdings are the smallest unit for planning consideration; yet present opportunities for supporting agriculture. With covenants on land titles, local governments and landowners can negotiate to attach special conditions governing the use and development of a private parcel. Covenants can also be used to notify property owners of adjacent agricultural activity, and guide the form, character and location of site improvements.



Pressure from urbanization on farmland is increasing.





RECENT INDICATORS OF THE FRAGILITY OF THE ALR

- 1 Decline in provincial government support for the ALR
- 2 ALR applications on the rise, particularly for large tracts of farmland for urban uses
- 3 Numerous applications targeting prime agricultural land
- 4 The use of the concepts of “net benefit to agriculture” and “community interests” in the service of ALR exclusion
- 5 Shrinking farm population and associated imposition of urban values on working lands





ALR MYTHS AND FACTS

- 1 We're running out of developable land** | Landowners, developers and local governments commonly cite population growth, economic development and urban expansion in support of farmland conversion applications. This approach assumes low-density, single-use, automobile-oriented development as the only solution to growth. Compact, efficient land use patterns that take advantage of redevelopment, infill and densification opportunities accommodate more people and economic opportunities within existing urban footprints and maximise our investment in taxpayer-funded infrastructure.
- 2 Farmland is abundant** | Contrary to the assumption that suitable land is readily available for farming, research raises questions about our ability to feed a growing demand for high quality local products. Initial data from Chilliwack, where 12,229 ha are actively farmed, show that just 324 ha of unused Class 1-3 farmland remain in the ALR. Comprised of small, scattered parcels this land cannot accommodate growth needs in the dairy, blueberry and raspberry sectors, subjecting these important local industries to uncertainty regarding their future viability.
- 3 The ALR is an appropriation of property rights** | A common misconception is that the ALR represents a “taking” of property rights. Land use and development laws in BC (and elsewhere) assume that zoning, based on careful planning, benefits each landowner and the community. As such, owners cannot expect zoning to remain constant, or claim any perpetual right to develop according to the zoning applicable at the time of purchase.
- 4 Farming is no way to earn a living** | Urban expansion into rural areas increases land values, can create conflicts that threaten the viability of agriculture, and often undermines the landscape and community characteristics that drove expansion in the first place. These factors, mitigated through careful planning predicated on a secure land base, are far more detrimental to the economics of agriculture than any inherent weakness or lack of vitality in the industry.





ALR MYTHS AND FACTS CONTINUED

- 5 **The ALR is shifting to Northern BC** | This myth asserts that the ALC is compensating for exclusions in the southwestern part of the province by adding land in the north, thus maintaining the overall size of the Reserve while allowing for development on valuable urban fringe lands. In fact, as the population in Greater Vancouver has consistently increased since the mid-70s, the region’s annual rate of ALR loss has declined steadily since 1983. Recognising communities can grow alongside, but not onto, productive farmland the Commission evaluates applications on their own merit.

- 6 **The previous Commission was not regionally responsive** | The ALC recently implemented a regional panel structure to be more regionally responsive to community needs. In fact, the Commission has a 31-year record of balancing local and regional land use issues with the provincial objective of preserving agriculture land. Its membership has always had representatives from different regions of the province, and since inception the Commission has worked with local governments and other agencies on the review of over 2,500 plans, bylaws and other land use policy documents.





ACT NOW

Concerned about the future of the ALR?

Here's what you can do today:

- 1 Visit the ALR website – www.greenbelt.bc.ca
- 2 Contact local and provincial authorities
- 3 Buy BC Foods to support local agriculture
- 4 Organise support for farmland protection in your community
- 5 Encourage your local government to form an Agricultural Advisory Committee and develop an Agriculture Plan
- 6 Sign up for the ALR Watch listserve
(alrwatch-subscribe@smartgrowth.bc.ca)





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