

## Regional District of Comox Valley<sup>1</sup> Agricultural Plan Summary

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### Regional District of Comox Valley Statistics:

Population (2006)	58,824
Jurisdictional Area:	
Regional District	234,427 ha
Plan Study Area	160,032 ha
Total Area Farmed (2001)	9633 ha
% of Farmland:	0.04%
Number of Farms (2001)	~ 300
ALR	~ 20,000 ha

**Date of plan:** November 25, 2002

**Title:** *Phase 2 - Comox Valley Agricultural Plan - "Close to Home"*

**Length:** 48 pages.

**Prepared by:** Qu'West Consulting Services, From the Ground Up, & Groundworks Strategic Marketing Services.

### Adoption Status:

- Endorsed by council resolution on February 24, 2003, under recommendation from the Community Planning Committee.

### Related documents:

- Phase 1 Report 1: History and Resources - July 28, 2002
- Phase 1 Report 2: Issues and Opportunities - April 10, 2002
- Comox Valley Agricultural Plan Maps<sup>1</sup>

### Purpose Statement:

- *"To further the development of socially, culturally, environmentally and economically sustainable farming."* (1)

### Highlights:

- *"The four key goals of the plan are to:"*
  1. *"Identify the current agricultural situation in the Comox Valley."*
  2. Educate governments and the public with regards to agriculture in the Comox Valley

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<sup>1</sup> In 2008, the Provincial Government re-adjusted regional district boundaries: Comox-Strathcona Regional District was split to form 2 new districts: Comox Valley Regional District, and Strathcona Regional District. Although the AAP was originally drafted for the Comox-Strathcona Regional District, the "plan area" only covers part of what is now Comox Valley Regional District. See attached maps for details.

3. Identify relationships between agricultural and other land uses, to foster and promote healthy relationships between land uses.
  4. Develop/write an AAP that *“furthers the development of socially/culturally, environmentally and economically sustainable farming in the plan area”*. (3)
- *“A Plan is an agenda for change. In this case, change is complex because agriculture is complex.”* (7)
  - AAP Vision Statement:
    - *“Agriculture in the Comox Valley will be a growing sector of the local economy, with a mix of small, medium and large scale enterprises, focused on regional and local markets. The Valley’s farms will provide a diversity of quality agricultural products. Farmers will be recognized for their wise stewardship of land and water resources and the Valley’s agricultural industry will be recognized for the important role it plays in the community.”* (8)

## Outlined Issues:

### Land Use Issues:

1. Agricultural Production and Wetland Protection
  - 30% of soils in Comox Valley need improved drainage systems for optimum productivity.
  - Fisheries policies restrict the possibility of wetland drainage.
2. Agricultural Compatibility with Wild Fish Production
  - Federal and provincial agencies place greater importance on fish and fish habitat protection than agricultural needs.
3. Agricultural Impact on Water Quality
  - Reduced water quality as a result of farm runoff, composting operations, and cattle watering is of increasing public concern.
4. Composting and Waste Management
  - Composting, both as a service to farmers and from farm uses, causes environmental concerns, nuisances such as odour, and provincial regulations place restrictions on composting, making it difficult for compost operations.
5. Rural Urban Interface
  - There has not been a priority place on adequate buffers to mitigate nuisances such as odour, noise, trespassing (human and pet), and litter.
  - Agricultural and urban expansion has resulted in conflict, without proper buffer separation.
  - These issues are the result of lack of guidelines or regulations requiring separation between uses.
  - Strategies are necessary to avoid creating new problems, as well as address existing problems.
6. Accuracy of Sensitive Habitat Atlas
  - Consistency between provincial and regional/municipal policies has resulted in a misplaced allocation of responsibility of riparian areas (more so on the agricultural community rather than the community as a whole)
7. Greenways and Trails
  - Greenways are of less concern to farmers than trails.
  - Trails are proposed to be developed adjacent to agricultural lands through the region.
8. Flooding caused by Upland Development
  - Storm water runoff is increasing as a result of urbanization; this runoff passes through agricultural areas.
  - Flooding and residual water can cause crop damage while reducing growth rates, yields and damaging soils.
9. Poor Soil Drainage
  - Improved drainage can increase land productivity, and have beneficial financial effects.

### Economic Issues:

1. Changing Farm Size:
  - Single product farms are declining in number but remaining farms are increasing in size.
  - Mixed use farms are increasing in numbers.
  - Mixed use farms that concentrate on local market opportunities presents an economic opportunity for the region.
2. Farm Business Succession

- Younger generations are either not interested or can't afford taking over farms.
- Expansion of farms to non-family employees creates management challenges.
- Fragmentation business and land is not desirable.

#### Marketing Issues/Opportunities:

1. Food Self Sufficiency
  - Only 10% of food consumed on island is produced on island.
  - Expanding food-self sufficiency is a desired outcome, and may possibly be achieved through better management, higher valued crops, better soil fertility, and improved irrigation and drainage.
2. New Food, Industrial and Agro Forestry Products
  - Local, regional and global markets and opportunities are continually evolving.
  - Awareness of emerging opportunities, as well as evaluation of these possibilities, is a challenge.
3. Local Marketing of Farm Products and Market Research
  - Opportunities for local marketing are unclear; research is necessary.
4. Marketing of Farm production opportunities
  - There are numerous parcels of all sizes throughout study area that are not in agricultural use.
  - Research needs to identify potential clients, information necessary for them, and an information delivery method.
5. On-Farm Processing
  - There isn't enough volume of any one product to justify local large scale processing
  - Value-added products & small scale production need to be encouraged.
  - There is no regularly accessible commercial kitchen facility in the Valley for local small scale producers.
6. Promotion of Local Products
  - There is not information base in the Comox Valley that allows for those interested in purchasing local products to find out what is available, at what quantity and price.
7. Agricultural Awareness/Cultural Activities
  - The agricultural sector must make more effort to go directly to the public, rather than vice-versa.
  - Farm tours/open houses should be encouraged and accommodated.

#### Policy Issues/Opportunities

1. Access to Water for Irrigation
  - Rights to surface water are allocated through licensing.
  - Limits for water removal are refined based on the needs of fisheries, and prioritized to that during the driest season.
  - Off-stream storage of water is very expensive
2. Food Safety
  - Local sale of meat products does not require federal inspection.
  - Sale outside of local markets, ie GVRD or CRD, requires federal inspection; there is no inspection facility in the region and upgrades/renovations to existing facilities is costly.

#### Producer Issues/Opportunities

1. Producer Training & Agri-tourism
  - Farmers need to become more involved with processing and marketing to improve access to local markets.
  - Comox Valley enjoys a healthy tourism industry, however there is room for expansion, especially with expanded airline service now in place.
2. Farm Labour
  - The availability and quality of local labour to assist farm operations is an ongoing concern for farm businesses.

#### Infrastructure Issues/Opportunities

- Improvements to agricultural infrastructure can potentially reduce input and marketing costs.
- A key issue is finding investors or the capital to develop infrastructure.

#### Objectives & Desired Outcomes:

NOTE: All strategies in this summary and in the agricultural plan are recommendations only, provided by the consultant, the AAC, and other contributors to the farm plan. Following is a summary of the “objectives”, and “desired outcomes”.

The Comox Valley *Agricultural Plan* divides objectives into 6 broad categories, each containing specific objectives, each with their own set of actions and desired outcomes.

1. Water Management:

- 1.1. Objective: Improve access to irrigation water sources for agriculture.
  - Desired Outcomes: Resolution of water management issues, improved cooperation, improved community awareness, increased number of irrigation systems, re-use of urban “waste-water”, improved access to groundwater, possible on farm water storage. Watershed planning is a key action.
- 1.2. Objective: Improve drainage infrastructure for agriculture.
  - Desire Outcomes: Improved surface water drainage, greater & improved access to surface water for irrigation, reduced impact of urban runoff. Storm water management and watershed management are key actions.
- 1.3. Objective: Improve the environmental resource data base and mapping.
  - Desired Outcomes: Improved accuracy of GIS mapping for planning, reduced conflict over resource use and management. Will assist in watershed planning.

2. Land Management:

- 2.2. Objective: Protect the agricultural land base.
  - Desired Outcomes: Retain the ALR land base through more and improved localised decision-making and improved communication between Regional District and ALC.
- 2.3. Objective: Develop management plans, policies and programs to support agricultural development.
  - Desired Outcomes: Reduced farm/non-farm conflict, improved “urban edge” policies, improved income generation/business opportunities in rural area, improved environmental protection in rural areas, as well as increased farmer education/awareness, as well as rural/urban resident education and awareness.
- 2.4. Objective: Develop planning initiatives to reduce the potential for land use conflict.
  - Desired Outcomes: A local mediator/panel, improved awareness and management of nuisance issues, improved awareness of nuisance sources and reduced conflict with farmers.

3. Agricultural/Environmental Stewardship

- 3.2. Objective: Develop and support plans and programs for environmental stewardship.
  - Improved environmental awareness, wildlife habitats, use of Environmental Farm Plans, watershed protection, reduced cost of environmental protection, reduced risk of water contamination. Provide compensation to those who set aside land for environmental purposes.

4. Agricultural Opportunities

- 4.2. Objective: Expand agricultural business opportunities and farm incomes.
  - Desired Outcomes: Establish an Agricultural Development Commission, providing a forum for discussion, debate and business development opportunities. Improve access to/awareness of information, and reduce farmer input costs. Support infrastructure development, retention of the Oyster River Research Farm, increased food self sufficiency, production opportunity, and potential to expand certain sectors.

5. Food Security, Market Development, Safety, Quality and Security

- 5.2. Objective: Increase agriculture’s contribution to the economy of the Comox Valley.
  - Desired Outcomes: Expansion of market opportunities, research, local marketing, a “Centre for “Innovation”, improved linkages to other business grounds, expanded island-wide marketing,

regulations to assist economic development, skills development, food safety confidence, expansion of local processing.

6. Agricultural Awareness

6.2. Objective: Improve community support for farmers and local production and to enhance agriculture's importance in the Region.

- Desired Outcomes: Increased public awareness through committees, campaigns, classroom education, workshops ("Food for thought"), maintenance of the AAC, continue the "Fall Fair" & increase Farmer's market support, improve signage, assist agri-tourism initiatives

NOTE: The *Agricultural Plan* lists several indicators and timelines for measurement and execution of these desired outcomes.

**Comox Valley Regional District OCP Supporting Statements:**

- None. The Rural Comox Valley OCP pre-dates the AAP, and does not have any specific references to the AAP.

Selected Rural Comox Valley OCP Agricultural Policies :

- " *Local government and senior government agencies shall be encouraged to develop a regional plan for agriculture in consultation with the farming community and the Regional District.*" (29)
- " *The economic importance of a sustainable agriculture industry to the Comox Valley shall be recognized and supported.*" (14)
- Development adjacent to ALR land shall conform to ALC Landscape Buffer Specifications (14).
- Retention, protection and enhancement of agricultural land shall be supported (14).
- Consolidation of small parcels of agricultural land is encouraged; reduction in land area of a viable farm operation is discouraged (14).

**Development Process/Timeline:**

Phase 1:

- Develop background report
- Conduct Focus Groups
- Develop Issues and Opportunities Report
- Develop Information Brochures

Phase 2:

- Public Open House and meeting - community comments.
- Agency and Organization consultation - those most likely to be involved in implementation.
- Conduct Focus groups - how to address issues & opportunities.
- Develop Draft Plan
- Public review at Fall Fair, Open House and Meeting
- Agency and Organization consultation
- Develop Final Plan

**AAC Status:**

According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, Comox Valley Regional District has an active AAC, as of February 2010. No information available on website, and no further information available at this time.

**References to Agricultural Land Commission Act:**

- No specific references to the Act, however the AAP makes several references to coordinating policy and decision making with the Agricultural Land Commission, specific to:
  - Environmental Stewardship
  - Delegation of decisions to municipalities (vs. ALC)
  - Regional Planning
  - Ongoing ALR management & policy development

**References to the Right to Farm (Farm Practices Protection) Act:**

- Acknowledgement that farmers are protected from nuisance lawsuits resulting from adjacent/conflict land uses.

**References to Water Rights (Canada Water Act, BC Water Act):**

- *“In most of the valley, rights to surface water from watercourses have already been allocated through licensing. In addition, limits for water removal are being refined based on the needs of the fishery. This means that in the driest season, when irrigation water is most needed, water allocation is likely to be prioritized to the fishery.”*
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