

## Municipal District of North Cowichan Strategic Agricultural Plan Summary

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### Municipal District of North Cowichan Statistics<sup>1</sup>:

Population (2006)	27,557
Jurisdictional Area	
Regional District:	20,576
Total Area Farmed (2006)	6,898
% of Farmland:	33.5%
Number of Farms (2006)	~ 389
ALR	6,354

**Date of agricultural plan:** May, 2001

**Title:** *North Cowichan Strategic Agricultural Plan*

**Length:** 55 pages.

**Prepared by:** George Penfold, Westland Resources & Paul Guiton, Groundworks Strategic Marketing Solutions

**Adoption Status:**

- Formally recognized in the Municipal District of North Cowichan’s 2002 Official Community Plan. See below.

**Related documents:**

- None.

**Purpose Statement:**

- “ ... to focus and co-ordinate decisions and actions of the participating and non-participatory organization(s). “

**Highlights:**

- “The agricultural sector in the Cowichan Valley will be healthy economically, socially and environmentally. It will consist of a medium scale farm component that markets through traditional commodity systems, and a small-scale farm component that markets both basic production and value added products to local and regional markets. The industry will be noted for its diversity and its support for, and from the community” (i).
- “Recognizing that the survival of agriculture depends on developing a more competitive base, and stronger consumer support ..... “ (i)

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<sup>1</sup> District of North Cowichan Agriculture in Brief. 2009. Province of British Columbia. Ministry of Agriculture and Lands.

- *“Many issues and concerns of farmers can, however, be addressed through local planning and decision-making as well as by provincial initiatives.” (1)*
- *“The focus of this Strategic Plan for Agriculture in North Cowichan is on those matters that can be addressed locally.” (1)*
- *“For an agricultural strategic plan to be successful, choices have to be agreed upon, the implications have to be understood, and the responsibility for implementation shared ... “ (1).*
- *“ This strategy places most emphasis on taking advantage of opportunities and competitive advantages that exist in the area and on addressing local situations that result in reduced competitiveness relative to other comparable areas.”*

### **Outlined Issues:**

- The North Cowichan Strategic Agricultural Plan organizes agricultural issues into Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Constraints:
1. Strengths:
    - 1.1. Product quality and diversity
      - The valley offers superior quality than imported foods, and boasts a diversity of crops.
    - 1.2. Economic Contribution and Potential
    - 1.3. Co-operation and Community Resources
      - There is a successful local farmers’ market, as well as an established agricultural community.
    - 1.4. Consumer loyalty
      - Vancouver Island locals are willing and wanting to support local producers.
    - 1.5. Processing
      - There are existing meat, cheese and wine processing facilities.
    - 1.6. Location
      - The District of North Cowichan is conveniently located close to supply major markets, tourism centres. Initiatives and infrastructure can be shared with other local agricultural areas.
  2. Weaknesses:
    - 2.1. Lack of community awareness of agriculture (Local Government & general public)
      - Agriculture is not included in economic development planning.
    - 2.2. Lack of infrastructure
      - Shortage of processing resources as well as limited local training programs.
    - 2.3. Lack of access to water
      - Farmers do not have assured access to water, despite their land being within the ALR
    - 2.4. High input costs
      - Most inputs must travel from the Mainland
      - Production of low value commodities
    - 2.5. Marketing
      - Local retailers do not support local producers
      - Limited marketing mechanisms are available to local producers
      - Agriculture is not included in promotion of local tourism
    - 2.6. Regulation
      - Environmental regulations place burdens on agriculture
      - Planning regulations/bylaws do not establish sufficient separation between land uses.
  3. Opportunities:
    - 3.1. Land Utilization
    - 3.2. Added Value
    - 3.3. Local Marketing
    - 3.4. Recycling

4. Constraints:

- 4.1. Loss of the “critical mass” required for viable agriculture production
- 4.2. Agricultural industry is in decline - potential loss of farms, skills/knowledge, infrastructure, economic activity, green space, and ALR land
- 4.3. Lack of connection with consumers and community leaders, retailers
- 4.4. Low awareness leads to reduced support from local government/community.
- 4.5. Cost of production
- 4.6. Environment
- 4.7. Continuing conflict between fisheries priorities and agriculture - it is impossible to farm economically.
- 4.8. Water supply
- 4.9. Lack of sufficient quantity of irrigation at critical times.

**Objectives & Desired Outcomes:**

NOTE: All goals & strategies in this summary (and in the *Strategic Agricultural Plan*) are recommendations only, provided by the consultant, the AAC, and other contributors to the farm plan. Following is a summary of the “goals”, “objectives”, and desired outcomes.

*The North Cowichan Strategic Agricultural Plan* outlines 6 major goals, each consisting of related objectives:

1. Goal: Improve the Planning Framework for Agriculture

- Over 80% of ALR land parcels are 8.0 hectares or larger; 18% are smaller than 0.4 hectare (1 acre) and likely in residential use.
- Larger parcels should be retained, and land outside of the ALR should be zoned to allow for agricultural use.
- Objectives:
  - 1.1. Protect the Agricultural Land Base
    - Use buffering or other techniques at critical urban/agricultural edges.
  - 1.2. Provide More Opportunities for Small Farms within the OCP and Zoning Bylaws
    - Update zoning bylaws to allow for more agricultural operations on farms (including value added, processing, marketing facilities), and allow for farming on all rural lands.
  - 1.3. Increase Agricultural Input on Planning Decisions
    - Utilize an agricultural planning committee.
    - Provide for better communication between all stakeholders (farmers, agencies, levels of government).

2. Goal: Support and Enhance Small Farm Section

- Small farms represent a size-able portion of North Cowichan’s agricultural industry -  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the value of all farm products comes from small holdings (less than 4 hectares).
- Objectives:
  - 2.1. Revitalize the Small Farm Sector in the District of North Cowichan
    - Identify products with market potential that are suitable for local agriculture
    - Develop training programs with other stakeholders.

3. Goal: Expand Local Market Opportunities

- One of the greatest challenges facing agriculture is effective marketing. Small farms and large farms, respectively, require different approaches.
- Agri-tourism offers significant potential to the agricultural industry.
- Objectives:
  - 3.1. Enhance Marketing Opportunities for Medium/Large Scale Farms
  - 3.2. Enhance Local Marketing Opportunities for Small Farms
    - Provide a location for Farmer’s Market
    - Provide highway signage and other localised marketing initiatives; promote agricultural products to local schools.
  - 3.3. Establish the Cowichan Valley as a Centre for Value Added Processing of Agricultural Products
    - Identify potential sites for value-added processing; provide support.
  - 3.4. Capitalize on Available Agri-Tourism Opportunities

### 3.5. Expand the Greenhouse Sector Through the Use of Alternative Energy Sources

#### 4. Goal: Improve Communications with the Community

- The lack of political and public awareness in the Cowichan Valley is a key challenge.
- Agriculture in the classroom is a key way to inform the public (at an early age).
- Objectives:
  - 4.1. Increase General Political and Public Awareness of the Agricultural Industry and Issues
  - 4.2. Develop a Strong Education in the Classroom Program with [Local School District (#79)]
  - 4.3. Increase Local Political and Public Awareness of the Agricultural Industry and Issues

#### 5. Goal: Improve Land and Water Stewardship, Conservation and Management

- Soil management and irrigation are key to successful agriculture; these resources must be management wisely.
- Water is limited in the summer months.
- Objectives:
  - 5.1. Improve Access to Water and Water Management
    - Develop a water management plan for the region that considers agriculture's needs, include grey-water management.
    - Coordinate storm-water management with farming practices.
    - Address water access through shared surface-water rights.
  - 5.2. Improve Information Related to Soil and Water Management
    - Improve soil assesment for irrigation. (MAFF)
  - 5.3. Improve Farm Management Skills
    - Farmer education.

#### 6. Goal: Reduce Cost and Regulatory Barriers

- Farmers need to be aware of regulations and policies; outside organizations (commodity interest groups) need to be responsible to deliver information.
- A lack of regulatory coordination is a costly burden on the agricultural industry.
- Objectives:
  - 6.1. Reduce Regulatory and Related Cost Burden on Agriculture
    - Ensure municipal costs do not discourage agricultural opportunities
    - Work with provincial and federal governments when needed.

#### **Development Process/Timeline:**

- 1998 - The Cowichan Agricultural Society (CAS) assisted in launching an initiative to establish the Island Farmers Alliance (IFA, to protect and advance their interests).
- Public workshops were held.
- The process was guided by a Steering Committee, with consultant assistance.
- The agricultural strategy was developed in conjunction with the District of North Cowichan's Official Community Plan review (2002).

#### **Municipal District of North Cowichan OCP Supporting Statements:**

- *"Historically, agriculture and forestry have played a major role in defining the character and economic growth of the District."* (21)
- *"The support of agriculture is a fundamental part of the Community Plan and actions to strengthening of the role of agriculture in the local economy will be undertaken. To this end, a Strategic Plan for Agriculture in North Cowichan has been prepared."* (21)
- *"The District will adopt the Agricultural Strategic Plan for North Cowichan as part of the Official Community Plan"* (22).
- The North Cowichan OCP briefly summarizes the goals and objectives of the Strategic Agricultural Plan, as well as provides supporting policies.

**AAC Status:**

- Ongoing. Generally meets on the second Tuesday of every month, however meetings in 2010 have been sporadic (twice between May and January). There are currently several vacancies.

**References to Agricultural Land Commission Act:**

- None.

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

- *“The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries generally monitor municipal actions dealing directly with agricultural land use and management under the province’s “Right to Farm” legislation”*
- This quote is discussing that although farmers are protected under this act from overlapping legislation, that they need to be aware, or more-so informed, of regulations, policies, and legislations (and as such the Agricultural Strategy recommends that this responsibility be taken on by an independent organization or interest group.).

**References to Water Rights:**

- *“ ... access to water is limited through lack of available licensed capacity in watercourses ...”*
- *“Increase water access through shared surface water rights access”* - through cooperation of multiple agencies and levels of governments.

**Notes and Observations**

- One of the implementation strategies was to keep the AAC active for 5 years; it has been almost 10 since the plan was finished, and the AAC continues to meet regularly and report to council.