

Comox Valley Agricultural Plan

December 2024

Acknowledgements

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Acronyms

AF	BC Ministry of Agriculture and Food
APC	Advisory Planning Commission
ALC	Agricultural Land Commission
ALR	Agricultural Land Reserve
ALUI	Agricultural Land Use Inventory
BCWS	BC Wildfire Service
BMP	Beneficial Management Practices
CVAP	Comox Valley Agricultural Plan
CVEP	Comox Valley Emergency Program
CVEX	Comox Valley Exhibition Grounds
CVFI	Comox Valley Farmers Institute
CVFMA	Comox Valley Farmers Market Association
CVRD	Comox Valley Regional District
DFO	Department of Fisheries and Oceans
EASC	Electoral Areas Services Committee
EFP	Environmental Farm Plan
EMBC	Emergency Management BC
ENV	BC Ministry of Environment
FOR	BC Ministry of Forests
GHG	Greenhouse Gas Emissions
IAFBC	Investment Agriculture Foundation
MIFI	Mid-Island Farmers Institute
MOTI	BC Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
TRAWP	Tsolum River Agricultural Watershed Plan
WLRS	BC Ministry of Water Land and Resource Stewardship

Executive Summary

The *Comox Valley Agricultural Plan* (CVAP) update considers agriculture within the current growth and policy context of the region and attempts to identify and anticipate future changes and challenges to the sector. The development and implementation of the *Comox Valley Agricultural Plan* is an important opportunity for elected officials, the agricultural sector, and community organizations to work together toward a more resilient and sustainable local economy. The objectives of the CVAP update are to:

- Provide an overview of the current challenges experienced by the regional agri-food system;
- Present policy and regulatory recommendations, and
- Develop a strategy to ensure the plan is implemented.

While food security is an important component of a resilient food system, the underlying contributors to household food insecurity (e.g. low-income, housing affordability, job security) are outside the scope of most agricultural plans. Therefore, most of the recommended actions in the CVAP do not directly address household food security. However, a strong agricultural sector, whereby producers of all commodity types and sizes are supported, will contribute positively to community food security.

The development of the CVAP was assisted by a Project Advisory Committee of local producers and processors,

Agriculture is the heart of the Comox Valley.

- *The history of the region, including during pre-colonial times when Indigenous food systems were abundant, will continue to influence this growing sector of the local economy today and into the future.*
- *With a mix of enterprises focused on a diversity of markets, the Valley's farms will continue to produce quality products.*
- *Farmers will be supported in their stewardship of land and water resources and become resilient to the impacts of climate change.*
- *The community will nurture a new generation of farmers with the capacity and resources to adapt and innovate so that a thriving agriculture and food system in the Comox Valley can continue to prosper.*

local government staff, and consultants. This final report is the culmination of a [Background Report](#), [Interim Report](#), and *What We Heard: Engagement Summary Report as well as an Implementation Strategy*. Through this engagement process, the following vision statement for the future of agriculture in the Comox Valley was crafted:

The CVAP identifies a total of 21 recommended actions presented under 5 goals:

1. Steward water resources to meet agricultural water needs.
2. Maintain agricultural land protection policies and support for producers.
3. Support actions to grow the regional agri-food economy.
4. Collaborate towards climate change adaptation, mitigation, and emergency preparedness.
5. Strengthen awareness of the Comox Valley agri-food sector.

The participation of senior levels of government, agricultural businesses, and community organizations will be essential to realize a resilient, sustainable, and profitable local agricultural sector. Shared leadership and a commitment of resources and ongoing community collaborations and partnerships will be required for full

implementation of the actions in this plan. This CVAP is intended to be a robust and dynamic document that will serve communities within the Comox Valley for at least the next 10 years.

1.0 Introduction

The Comox Valley Regional District respectfully acknowledges the land on which it operates is on the unceded traditional territory of the K'ómoks First Nation, the traditional keepers of this land. As an important ongoing aspect of planning and implementation, the development of the CVAP has been undertaken through an over-arching lens of reconciliation. It is understood that this will require a deepening of dialogue and working and governing relationships with K'ómoks First Nation on both traditional food harvesting and agricultural issues. This dialogue could centre around areas of joint interest and approaches to collaboration, including initiatives that could be pursued collectively.

The Comox Valley stretches from the central east coast of the Vancouver Island to the mountains of the Vancouver Island ranges. The area consists of a gently sloping terrain, descending from west to east, creating various drainage patterns and microclimates. Most of the Comox Valley's rain falls in the winter months or is mixed with snowfall, with summers being characterized as dry and prone to bouts of drought.¹ Land within the Comox Valley has been used for food-related purposes throughout history. In pre-colonial times, the Pentlatch ancestors of the K'ómoks First Nation occupied the area now known as the Comox Valley and practiced an array of ecosystem management techniques to increase the abundance of preferred plant and animal species in the local area². Early historical records indicate that the Comox Valley was closely managed and tended by local Pentlatch people for millennia, and the land was undoubtedly owned by specific Pentlatch lineages. The Tsolum River prairie, the open parkland environment encountered by colonists in the mid-19th century in the Comox Valley were anthropogenic environments that were regularly and carefully managed by local Pentlatch people. These prairies were the northern extent of the Garry Oak ecosystem and hosted a range of plant species that were important to traditional Pentlatch diets. These species included camas (*Camassia quamash*), bracken fern (*Pteridium aquilinum*), blueberry (*Vaccinium sp.*), and saskatoon berry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*). The primary way Pentlatch people maintained these Garry Oak ecosystems and associated prairies was through the use of controlled burns. By burning these prairies, Pentlatch people maintained their extent and increased the productivity of desired plant species and deer.

As colonial populations increased from the late 1800's to mid 1900's agricultural development became a prominent form of land use, and Vancouver Island farms provided much of the food required by residents.³ However, in the last 50 years there has been a decrease in the proportion of food that is produced on the island – unverified figures suggest what was once a resiliency rate of 85% is now closer to 5-10%.⁴ The *Comox Valley Agricultural Plan* (CVAP) update provides a coordinated approach to support agriculture and food systems in the Comox Valley over the next 10 years. The goal is to work towards a great level of self-sufficiency while ensuring that a wide range of agricultural endeavours and food-related initiatives are sustained.

¹ Pacific Climate Impacts Consortium. [Plan2Adapt tool](#). Accessed May 2022.

² Content provided by Dr. Jesse Morin.

³ Strategies for Increasing Food Security on Vancouver Island. Vancouver Island Community Research Alliance, Office of Community Based Research. 2011.

⁴ A Baseline Assessment of Food Security in British Columbia's Capital Region. Emily MacNair. 2004.

1.1 Agricultural Plan Study Area

The Comox Valley includes K'ómoks First Nation lands as well as land under the local government jurisdictions of the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) and its member municipalities (Figure 1). The CVRD is located on the eastern coast of Vancouver Island, British Columbia (BC). The CVRD covers an area of 2,425 km², of which 700 km² is water. The region encompasses several watersheds that provide water to agricultural and residential users. Such watersheds include Comox Lake, the Tsolum River, the Oyster River, Black Creek, and Roy Creek. In recent years, concerns have been raised about the security of water quantity in the region and pressures placed on freshwater resources, due to climate change and drought-related crop requirements and increasing residential development.⁵ The Tsolum River Agricultural Watershed Plan (TRAWP)⁶ was developed to better understand the demands on the watershed and identify responsible use for the future security of the watershed. The TRAWP culminated several recommendations, such as collaborative management of the Tsolum watershed (including proactive land-use planning and policy co-creation with K'ómoks), improving understanding of the watershed and climate change, encouraging sustainable water management through the use of provincial management tools, and supporting community and producers in water management techniques.

The CVRD contains three electoral areas and three municipalities (Figure 1).

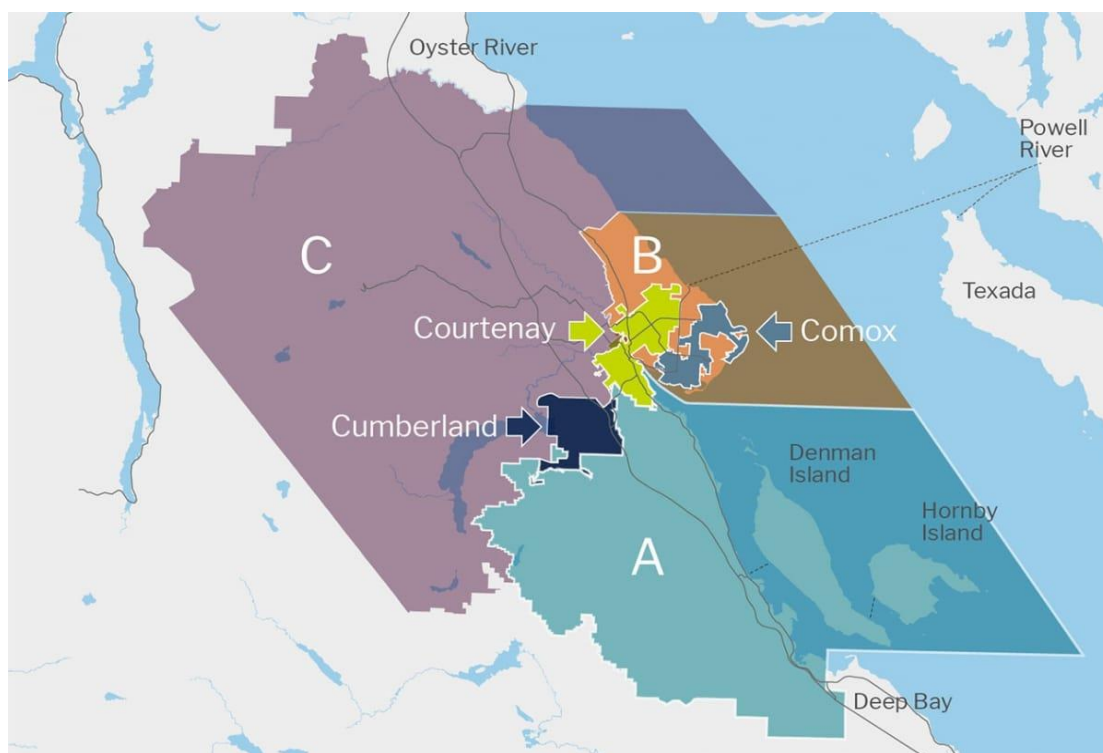


Figure 1. Map of the Comox Valley Regional District.

⁵ CVRD. [Tsolum River Agricultural Watershed Plan](#), Phase One. February 2019.

⁶ CVRD. [Tsolum River Agricultural Watershed Plan](#), Phase Two. May 2021.

The municipalities host most of the food-retail and processing infrastructure and labour pool. There is active farming within the City of Courtenay's boundaries. The Town of Comox was historically an agricultural area and still retains some agricultural heritage, with many farms surrounding Comox in Electoral Area B. The Village of Cumberland developed as a mining town rather than a farming community, but the population is supportive of local food products and the town has numerous food related businesses. Denman Island, located in Electoral Area A, has a Farm Plan that was developed in 2010⁷. Electoral Area A is known as Canada's oyster capital and has a history of seafaring and shellfish production. More than half of BC's shellfish production comes from Baynes Sound⁸. Electoral Area C is home to most of the CVRD's farms and is the focus of the CVAP study area. While aquaculture was not specifically included within the scope of work of the CVAP update, it was considered where it overlapped with recommendations as they arose, particularly with regards to land-based aquaculture.

1.2 Agricultural Planning Framework

Agriculture is governed by a network of Federal, Provincial, and local governments, each playing a specific role in regulating and providing services to the use of agricultural land, the making and distribution of food products, and ensuring the health and safety of the food system. Other entities and departments within levels of government focus on the economics of agriculture and on the interface between environmental protection, climate change and agriculture. At the provincial level, important policies and regulations include the *Agricultural Land Commission Act*, *Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act*, *Water Sustainability Act*, *Environmental Management Act*, and *Assessment Act*.

Regional Districts play a role in region-wide planning by developing a Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) and other policies that link or coordinate the otherwise independent planning and land use regulation choices of member municipalities. The CVRD RGS was adopted in 2011, with a new direction for land use management that included a shift from planning within the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) for rural areas, to planning specifically for agricultural areas. There are eight goals areas in the RGS, and the agriculture and food sector intersect with several of them, such as "Food Systems", "Ecosystems, Natural Areas and Parks", and "Local Economy". The RGS identifies the land uses for agriculture within the Rural Settlement Areas and Agricultural Areas, which have been established using the ALR boundaries. Land use policies and regulations in the CVRD's three electoral areas are contained within the Rural Comox Valley Official Community Plan (OCP) and the Rural Comox Valley Zoning Bylaw which contain relevant policies and regulations. The OCP advances the 2011 RGS' land use management direction with specific policy directions to preserve the integrity of agricultural areas and to direct non-farm development to areas outside the ALR.

An Agricultural Plan focuses on a community's farming areas to uncover practical solutions to challenges and to identify opportunities to strengthen the agricultural sector and to contribute to the community's long-term sustainability.⁹ The intent of agricultural planning is to develop recommendations to support the agricultural viability of the community. While food security is an important component of a resilient food system, the underlying contributors to household food insecurity (e.g. low-incomes, housing affordability, job security) are outside the scope of most agricultural plans. However, a strong agricultural sector, where producers of all commodity types and sizes are supported, will contribute positively to community food

⁷ [Denman Island Farm Plan](#), 2010. Islands Trust.

⁸ Government of Canada. [Community profile: Comox Valley](#). Accessed June 2022.

⁹ Smith, B. 1998. [Planning for Agriculture](#). BC Ministry of Agriculture publication.

security.¹⁰ Successful Comox Valley farms, whether they sell their goods locally or not, contribute to a region that attracts and retains the supporting networks and businesses necessary for a resilient food system, such as farmers institutes, equipment dealers and mechanics, seed and feed stores, food distribution companies, and other networks. Increasing the agricultural productive capacity of Vancouver Island, through methods which are sustainable as well as economically and socially beneficial to local communities, will support food security in the Comox Valley.

1.3 Agricultural Profile of the Comox Valley

An Agricultural Land Use Inventory (ALUI) was completed for the CVRD by AF in 2013. Results indicated that of the over 23,000 ha of ALR in the CVRD (Figure 2), only 23% was being actively farmed and 38% of land was unusable for farming due to built infrastructure (roads, utilities, etc.), residential use, waterbodies, wetlands, or its status as a park or reserve. The ALUI found that 28% of farms in the Comox Valley were using irrigation in 2013. As the climate warms and summers become drier, the need for irrigation is expected to increase across the region.¹¹

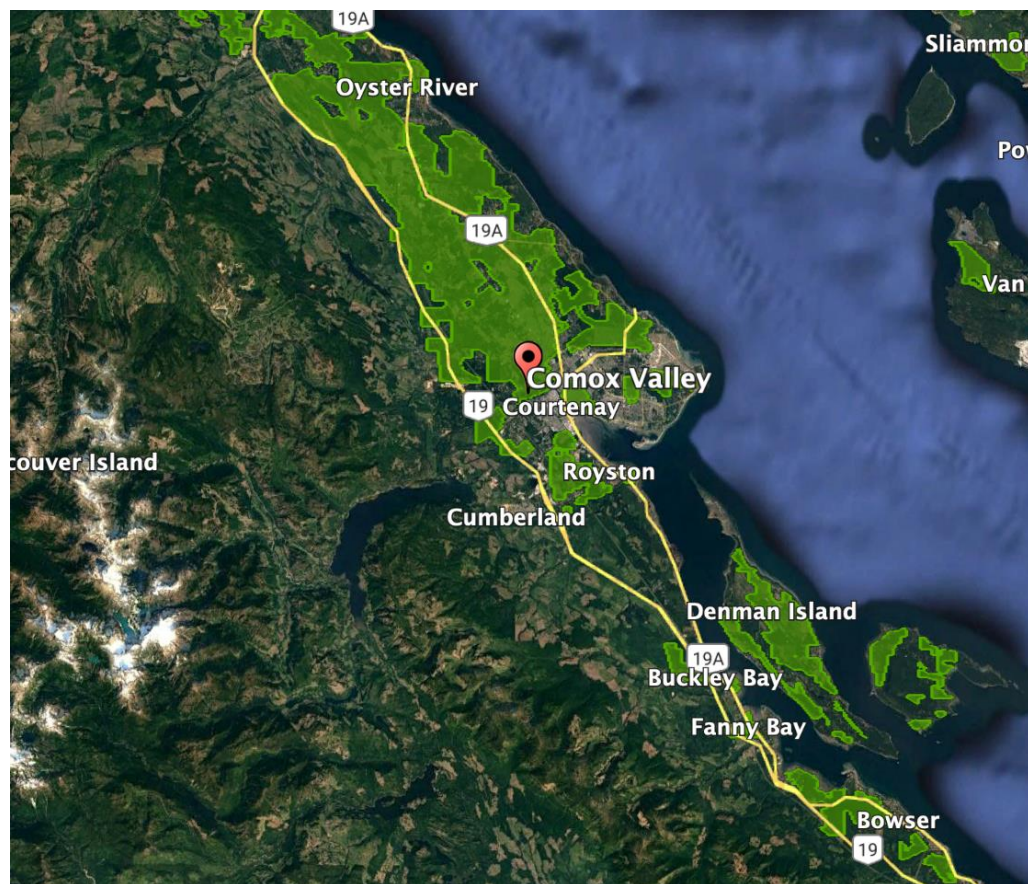


Figure 2. Agricultural Land Reserve (green) in the Comox Valley.¹²

¹⁰ Community food security arises when all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice.

¹¹ Climate and Agriculture Initiative BC. [Regional Adaptation Strategy: Vancouver Island](#). 2020.

¹² BC Ministry of Agriculture. Comox Valley Regional District Land Use Inventory. 2014.

The federal Census of Agriculture showed a drop in number of farms in the Comox Valley, from 416 in 2016 to 351 in 2021. This drop is likely partly due to a change in the Census definition of a “farm”, whereby producers must indicate that farm income in being reported to the Canada Revenue Agency, rather than simply having an “intent to sell” agricultural products, in order to qualify as a Census-defined farm.

As land has continued to be subdivided over the last century, by 2021 over a third (37%) of Comox Valley farms were less than 4 ha (10 acres) in size, with few farms over 40 ha (100 acres). Smaller parcels are associated with non-farm use of agricultural land, such as rural estates.¹³ Although some types of agriculture can be successful on small parcels, (e.g., intensive market gardens, greenhouse operations, nurseries), generally the smaller the parcel is, the fewer viable options there are for farming. This is illustrated through 2022 BC Assessment data, presented in Table 1.¹⁴

Table 1. Number of parcels with Farm Class Tax Status based on parcel size in the Comox Valley.

	<2.0 acres < 0.8 ha	2 – 10 acres 0.8 – 4 ha	> 10 acres > 4 ha	Total
Total Parcels with Farm Class*	28	247	540	815

The most common type of Comox Valley farming operation is fruit and tree nut production, cattle ranching, hay production, and vegetable production. Figure 3 presents the types of farming taking place in Comox Valley in 2021 on a total of 351 farms¹⁵.

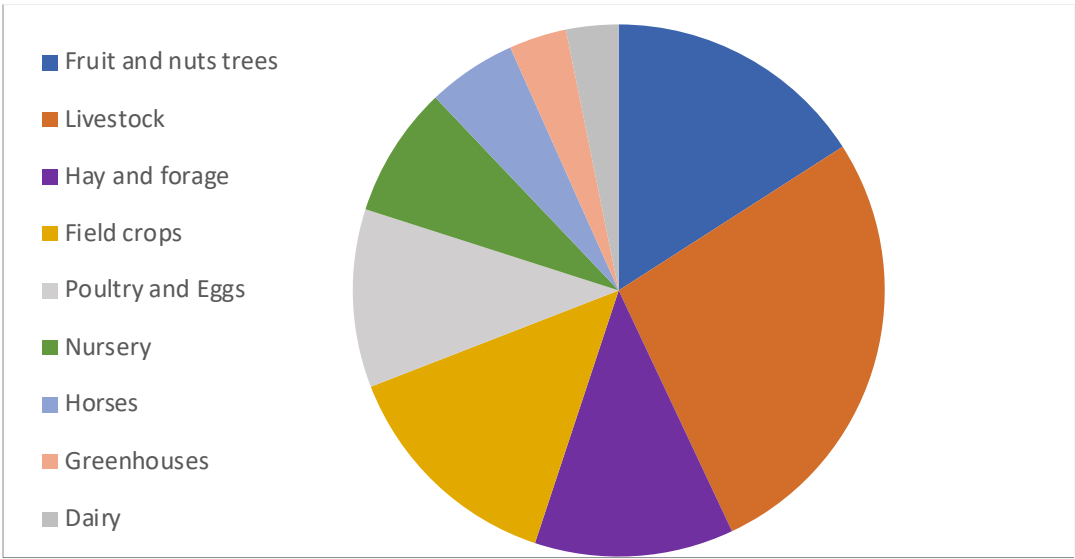


Figure 3. Farm types in the Comox Valley in 2021, total is 351 farms (Source: Statistics Canada, 2021).

¹³ Ministry of Agriculture. [Comox Valley Land Use Inventory Report](#). 2013.

¹⁴ BC Assessment, 2022.

¹⁵Census of Agriculture, 2021.

The average age of farmers in the Comox Valley is 59 years old. Despite this, only 24 farms (7%) had written succession plans in 2021. A total of 35 farms reported using employed labour on the farm, in addition to the primary farm operator. Of those, 25 farms reported providing full time work on a year-round basis, while 22 farms reported part-time work year-round and total of 21 farms reported hiring on a part-time seasonal/temporary basis.

Comox Valley producers must offset income with the costs of land, labour, and agricultural inputs such as fertilizers, fuel, and feed. Many farmers across different regions of BC have indicated challenges in producing sufficient financial resources to afford adequate farm labour, equipment, and other farm inputs (seeds, feed, soil amendments, etc.) to enhance production levels, and the situation in the Comox Valley area is no different. In 2021, average gross margins were 4%, meaning that for every \$1.00 spent by the farmer, \$1.04 was earned by the farmer. A full 33% reported less than \$10,000 in gross farm receipts, and 10% farms reported no earnings at all.

Farming on Vancouver Island creates challenges to accessing larger markets on the Lower Mainland and beyond. Access to transportation and distribution infrastructure is required to reach the larger domestic and export markets and while the CVRD is well-served by several transportation routes such as Highway 19, Highway 19a, and BC Ferries, this transportation comes at a growing expense as the cost of fuel rises. While there are large scale distributors and grocers in Comox Valley, many small-scale producers struggle to meet contracting requirements such as volume, labelling and quality control (e.g. Good Agricultural Practices or GAP certification). There are additional local vendors creating alternative opportunities for selling locally produced foods into the community, such as LUSH Valley's Harvest Box¹⁶, an operation which purchases fresh food from local producers and distributes them through a weekly harvest box program. Many farms in the Comox Valley, over 190, are selling directly to customers through farm gate stands, farmers markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and direct deliveries to consumers.¹⁷

Processing services and resources are a critical part of a diversified agri-food system, offering opportunities for producers to create value-added products, build their businesses in new directions and extend their season through preserves and storage crops. Food processing services encompass everything from slaughter and cut and wrap, to value-added processing into jams and frozen goods. Comox Valley farmers have access to four abattoirs and there are several farmgate licenses in the area which allow for limited on-farm slaughter. Comox Valley is home to dozens of food processors from craft beverage makers to condiments and pasta makers. In recent years there has been discussion of creating a farmer food hub, which would provide farmers access to storage space, food processing tools in a commercial kitchen, and a central location for distribution.

The long-standing agricultural nature of Comox Valley means that the region is home to a variety of agricultural support services including farmers institutes, regional agrologists, 4-H clubs, producers associations, policy councils and the Comox Valley Exhibition. Each of these organizations helps to round out support, information, and resources for farmers.

¹⁶ LUSH Valley. [Introducing the New Harvest Box Program](#). July 2020.

¹⁷ Census of Agriculture. [Direct sales of agricultural products to consumers](#). 2021.

In order to ground-truth the findings of the background report and to identify key issues and opportunities, engagement activities took place over approximately 10 months (Fall 2022 to Spring 2023). There were two distinct rounds of engagement:

- The first round developed an understanding of the challenges, and opportunities facing the sector, primarily through interviews and Project Advisory Committee Meetings, and
- The second-round dove deeper on the key areas of concern identified in round one, through community workshops, focus group meetings, a webinar and written submissions.

The process held space for the involvement of the K'ómoks First Nation and communications were led by CVRD leadership. A consultant for K'ómoks First Nation provided content regarding pre-colonial food systems within the community to inform the Background Report.

Engagement with the agricultural community took place over a two-year period, from November 2022 to October 2024. A detailed overview of all the engagement activities undertaken, including perspectives heard, is available in the *What We Heard: Engagement Summary Report*. Table 2 provides a breakdown of those who engaged in the process through interviews, in-person workshops, meetings with CVFI, MIFI, CVFMA, an online survey, and written submissions.

Notably, almost 75% of the 113 people that participated are from the agri-food sector. It is important to note that some people who attended multiple events but were counted as separate individuals.

Table 2. Summary of individuals engaged between November 2022 and October 2024.

Category	#	%
Agri-food sector meetings & interviews	82	48
General outreach*	61	36
Local agri-food organizations	14	8
Government staff meetings & interviews	13	8
Total	170	100

**45 of these are survey respondents, which included some members of the agricultural community*

2.0 Vision, Goals, and Recommendations

The *Background Report*, *Interim Report*, and *What We Heard: Engagement Summary Report* all contain detailed information and data that inform the vision, goals, objectives, and actions of the plan.¹⁸

2.1 Vision Statement

The vision statement describes a clear, comprehensive future state and intention for agriculture in the Comox Valley. This vision is intended to provide a common point on the horizon to orient all efforts in the same direction.

Agriculture is the heart of the Comox Valley.

- *The history of the region, including during pre-colonial times when Indigenous food systems were abundant, will continue to influence this growing sector of the local economy today and into the future.*
- *With a mix of enterprises focused on a diversity of markets, the Valley's farms will continue to produce quality products.*
- *Farmers will be supported in their stewardship of land and water resources and become resilient to the impacts of climate change.*
- *The community will nurture a new generation of farmers with the capacity and resources to adapt and innovate so that a thriving agriculture and food system in the Comox Valley can continue to prosper.*

2.2 Goals

The goals presented here reflect the vision statement and aims articulated and amalgamated through feedback received during engagement and presented in the *Interim Report*. The goals and associated actions are not presented in order of importance; all are critical for improving agricultural capacity.

1. Steward water resources to meet agricultural water needs.
2. Maintain agricultural land protection policies and support for producers.
3. Support actions to grow the regional agri-food economy.
4. Collaborate towards climate change adaptation, mitigation, and emergency preparedness.
5. Strengthen awareness of the Comox Valley agri-food sector.

2.3 Recommendation Tables

Each CVAP goal represents a result to be achieved through a list of 21 recommended actions. The actions are intended to be achievable, measurable, relevant, and time-bound where possible. The associated Implementation Strategy includes specific roles & responsibilities, funding opportunities, and anticipated timeframe.

¹⁸ All accompanying reports can be found on the CVAP webpage: <https://www.comoxvalleyrd.ca/projects-initiatives/strategies/comox-valley-agricultural-plan>

Goal 1: Steward water resources to meet agricultural water needs.

Water availability is one of the top issues identified by the agricultural community. At the same time, provincial regulations stipulate that water levels must be maintained for fish and aquatic ecosystem health. Meanwhile, the population of the Comox Valley continues to rise, placing increased pressure on water systems due to residential, commercial, and industrial demand. Although water resource management is largely governed by regulations set through the provincial *Water Sustainability Act*, the CVRD does have some leverage at the local level. A recommendation first noted within the TRAWP is to form a regional watershed stewardship service, as a new service area for the CVRD. This concept is currently in exploratory stages and is generally supported by the agricultural community. This points to the opportunity to integrate water resource management into land use planning decisions more generally and to further engage with the agricultural community on water-related decision-making.

Table 3. Goal 1 recommendations.

Action	Description
1.1	<p><i>Support alternative water collection and storage practices within the agricultural community.</i></p> <p>1.1.1 Continue to encourage the Ministry of Agriculture and Food (AF) to run workshops regarding dugouts, storage ponds, rainwater collection tanks, and other forms of water storage.</p> <p>1.1.2 Support AF, industry groups, and farmers institutes in sharing construction requirements for on-farm water storage and any vendor lists that are developed by these agencies.</p> <p>1.1.3 Advocate to senior levels of government to reduce administrative and regulatory barriers to building on-farm water storage facilities.</p> <p>1.1.4 Provide information regarding funding opportunities and other resources for alternative water collection and on-farm storage, while acknowledging that water quality treatment may be required for some types of farming using collected water.</p>
1.2	<p><i>Advocate for drainage upgrades and maintenance of existing agricultural ditches.</i></p> <p>1.2.1 Identify and document existing needs to improve, extend, and maintain drainage ditch systems including flood gates within agricultural areas (such as the Courtenay Flats Drainage Service Area). Communicate these needs to Provincial and Federal levels of government.</p> <p>1.2.2 Partner with DFO, ENV, and AF to host educational events that examine drainage issues on farmland and scenarios that may, or may not, require permitting and authorizations.</p> <p>1.2.3 Advocate to Provincial and Federal government agencies to provide the agricultural community with resources to improve drainage infrastructure, ditch clearing, maintenance, and upgrades.</p>
1.3	<p><i>Encourage water stewardship planning and practices.</i></p> <p>1.3.1 Work with K'ómoks First Nation to identify areas of shared management and interest in water stewardship.</p> <p>1.3.2 Explore the opportunity to develop a regional Watershed Sustainability Plan.</p> <p>1.3.3 Work with AF to update the ALUI and associated Agricultural Water Demand Model on a regular basis (e.g., every 10 years) to obtain a more accurate estimate of agricultural water needs.</p> <p>1.3.4 Advocate for agricultural water licences to be fast-tracked through FrontCounterBC.</p> <p>1.3.5 Implement the recommended actions published in the TRAWP.</p> <p>1.3.6 Ensure that the collection and tracking of water use data is effectively communicated to illustrate the impact of different land uses on water resources.</p> <p>1.3.7 Develop clear communications regarding the CVRD's role and regulatory abilities with regards to issuing residential building permits, water sources, and watershed planning.</p>
1.4	<p><i>Ensure that if a regional watershed stewardship service is created that it includes agriculturally specific outreach and extension regarding water-related issues in the region.</i></p> <p>1.4.1 Consult with the agricultural community if/when a regional watershed stewardship service is being developed.</p>

Goal 2: Maintain agricultural land protection policies and support for producers.

Policies and legislation affecting agricultural land in the Comox Valley overlap between the Province, the CVRD, and member municipalities. Policies that both support the land base, as well as serving the needs of producers and their operations, is critical to growing the local agricultural economy. Continuing to align local and regional planning efforts with provincial regulations will help to minimize conflicts between producers and non-producers and support farming activities. New initiatives must also emerge to reduce the impacts of public trails in farming areas. Although trails, camping, outdoor education, parks, and protected areas are often supported by the public, when occurring near farmland they can weaken or impede the development of a viable agriculture sector. Using a nested approach within policy to protect agricultural land and support producers will help to lead to an increase in confidence in the sector, and in the productivity of land base.

Table 4. Goal 2 recommendations.

Action	Description
2.1	<p><i>Maintain the Agricultural Coordinator position.</i></p> <p>2.1.1 Continue to commit resources to the Agricultural Coordinator position.</p> <p>2.1.2 Develop a clear description of the role and responsibilities of the Agricultural Coordinator position. The implementation of many of the actions in this plan could form the basis for the job description.</p> <p>2.1.3 Meet with representatives from CVFI and MIFI to ensure that the Agricultural Coordinator position is designed to support both organizations but is firmly embedded within CVRD staff and not cross-appointed to other organizations.</p>
2.2	<p><i>Re-assess the role of the Agricultural Advisory Planning Commission.</i></p> <p>2.2.1 Examine the current Terms of Reference of the CVRD's Agricultural Advisory Planning Commission (APC), which currently is limited to reviewing applications and advising the Board on agricultural matters. Consider expanding the role of the APC to that of an Advisory Committee, with the ability to complete tasks, manage a budget, facilitate cross-organizational communication, and take on a role in overseeing the implementation of the CVAP.</p>
2.3	<p><i>Enhance compliance and enforcement for farmland protection.</i></p> <p>2.3.1 Develop communications materials (such as a brochure or factsheet) that can be distributed by CVRD and member municipalities' building permitting offices to ALR landowners and developers regarding the legislated restrictions on development on ALR land. This may require some staff training to ensure regulations are well-understood. The building permitting offices have both an opportunity and responsibility to educate landowners and assist with enforcement of ALR land use. This will help to ensure that building permits are granted to landowners who are aware of the regulations.</p> <p>2.3.2 Work with the ALC to develop and resource a coordinated joint compliance and enforcement strategy for land within the ALR to prioritize and address ongoing issues over the longer term.</p> <p>2.3.3 Work with partners to identify enforcement issues on non-ALR farmland. This could include training and education for the CVRD's and municipal permitting departments regarding ALR development restrictions.</p> <p>2.3.4 Foster partnerships between Electoral Areas and municipalities to create effective urban-agricultural interfaces that are maintained under development pressures.</p>

Action	Description
2.4	<p><i>Be consistent with provincial policies, bylaws, and best practices through tools such as the Regional Growth Strategy, Official Community Plan, and Zoning Bylaw.</i></p> <p>2.4.1 Continue to recognize agriculture (including land-based aquaculture) as a priority use within the ALR, restricting non-farm uses.</p> <p>2.4.2 Consider adopting building setbacks on non-ALR properties that are adjacent to ALR land in an effort to reduce conflicts between neighbours. Explore tools and solutions from other jurisdictions that address setbacks from farms that are not in the ALR.</p> <p>2.4.3 Ensure land use designations and zoning tools indicate support for farms located outside the ALR and provide similar benefits (such as farm stands).</p> <p>2.4.4 Update the Zoning Bylaw with ALC policies and regulations for ALR lands. This will require an assessment as to whether or not to match the number and maximum size of dwellings with current provincial regulations, or to impose additional restrictions.</p> <p>2.4.5 When updating the OCP and/or Zoning Bylaw, follow ALC and AF requirements and guidelines regarding residential uses on farmland. The ALC's Guide to Bylaw Development in Farming Areas and AF's Guide to Edge Planning are key resources regarding residential footprints and maximum setbacks.</p> <p>2.4.6 Refer draft RGS, OCP, and zoning bylaw amendments to the ALC for review.</p> <p>2.4.7 Review and evaluate the Farmland Protection Development Guidelines to determine if adjustments should be made to improve effectiveness.</p> <p>2.4.8 Advocate to the province to modernize taxation policies to stimulate agricultural production. This can be accomplished through letter-writing and support for resolutions at UBCM.</p>
2.5	<p><i>Continue to manage and reduce conflicts between producers, recreational trail users, and wildlife.</i></p> <p>2.5.1 Document conflicts that producers experience with trail users, particularly impacts from unleashed dogs and trespassers.</p> <p>2.5.2 Continue to install fencing along Right of Ways between trails and farms to protect both livestock, wildlife, and pets, as needed.</p> <p>2.5.3 Support the work of external agencies to further reduce conflicts between farms and trail users, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Educational institutions or community groups to develop and fund a pilot project that examines the use of hedgerows as an appropriate barrier along some trails. - Initiatives that pilot innovative ways to reduce wildlife and waterfowl conflicts on farms. - Provincial workshops on electric fencing and other measures to mitigate conflicts with livestock while ensuring safety for wildlife.

Goal 3: Support actions to grow and strengthen the regional agri-food economy.

Comox Valley producers and processors currently sell their products locally, regionally, provincially, and internationally, however they have identified that a re-investment in local services and infrastructure would reinvigorate the sector. The agri-sector community has also indicated that the Comox Valley could benefit from a regional market analysis, whereby specific growing opportunities and routes to market are investigated. This will require a detailed analysis of business indicators and will provide the business case for investment into infrastructure, services, and other resources for the sector. This type of initiative could be aligned with a Regional Agricultural Service. A sector strategy would allow for a strengthening of the economic development lens. This could be accomplished, in part, by integrating some of the objectives being explored in the regional tourism strategy.

Table 5. Goal 3 recommendations.

Action	Description
3.1	<p><i>Seek opportunities for establishing a permanent location(s) for farmers markets and local food retail.</i></p> <p>3.1.1 Re-assess the feasibility work completed to date on the re-development of the CVEX site to ensure a priority is placed on infrastructure for a year-round permanent farmers market.</p> <p>3.1.2 Meet with the CVFMA, CVFI, and MIFI to initiate a process around establishing multiple location(s) for local food pop-up markets, and other avenues for regional producers to connect with consumers.</p> <p>3.1.3 Help promote the Farmers Market Coupon program.</p>
3.2	<p><i>Develop an agri-food sector market assessment and growth strategy for the Comox Valley.</i></p> <p>3.2.1 Using the Census of Agriculture, BC Assessment, and the ALUI as a baseline, investigate the true economic value of the regional agri-food sector (including aquaculture) such as gross revenues, labour, and secondary services. The recent BC Farmers Market Economic Impact Study can also be used to inform this work.</p> <p>3.2.2 Work with BC Transit and CVRD staff to seize opportunities to increase transit services to rural areas to facilitate farmworker commutes, particularly during evenings and weekends.</p> <p>3.2.3 Explore innovative opportunities or practices within CVRD's jurisdiction to support new entrants into joining the agri-food marketplace and maintain (or increase) the productivity of ALR land, such as purchasing land to develop and incubate farm businesses and lease land to new farmers.</p>
3.3	<p><i>Support investment into services and infrastructure that expands regional food processing, storage, and aggregation capacity.</i></p> <p>3.3.1 Consider CVEX in the establishment of a regional Agricultural Service, or as an anchor asset. Maximizing the use of the CVRD's existing lands and assets, such as the Exhibition Grounds, should be accommodated for the benefit of the agri-food sector. This could involve developing a specific list of needs and wants from the agricultural community at the CVEX location (e.g. an agriculture centre, permanent market space, feed / hay storage, seed saving, shared processing space, etc.)</p> <p>3.3.2 Continue to work with industry and community interests around establishing shared food infrastructure facilities in the Comox Valley. This may include working with the BC Food & Beverage Association, Small Scale Food Producers Association, and others to ensure that food safety requirements and standards are met in the development of any new infrastructure.</p> <p>3.3.3 Identify shared interest, common ground, and potential assets for regional food infrastructure with K'ómoks First Nation.</p> <p>3.3.4 Work with the Farmers Institutes to secure funds and/or financing from grants or lending agencies for new agri-business ventures. This could include offering letters of support.</p>

Action	Description
3.4	<p><i>Develop a regional Food Security Plan for the Comox Valley</i></p> <p>3.4.1 Work with key regional collaborators to develop a regional Food Security Plan that would align with the CVAP and other CVRD plans. The plan should ensure that equity-seeking/deserving groups (e.g. seniors, youth, single parent families, refugees, and new residents) are engaged in identifying challenges and opportunities for improving household food security.</p> <p>3.4.2 Consider both household and community food security by examining policies and strategies that local governments and regional entities can adopt to support better access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate foods.</p> <p>3.4.3 Consider incorporating food waste reduction and food recovery into a regional solid waste management plan. This could involve partnering with local organizations such as Lush Valley, Second Harvest, Fishes and Loaves, CVFMA, and others. Strategies to minimize food waste at different stages of production, distribution, and consumption could be included.</p>

Goal 4: Collaborate towards climate change adaptation and mitigation, and emergency preparedness.

It is estimated that, by 2050, the CVRD will experience climate shifts that include a rise in median temperatures of approximately 2.7°C, an increase in precipitation by 3%, and a decrease in winter snowfall by 74%. Climate change is projected to cause flooding in the spring and more severe drought conditions in the summer, putting pressure on irrigation infrastructure and water availability. Increased wildfire risk and alterations to precipitation patterns, due to climate change, will affect wildlife populations and movement patterns. Emergency planning efforts must continue to consider the more frequent occurrences of droughts and wildfires. Emergency management and preparedness planning should include an agricultural perspective and invite producers to the table when organizing an approach to respond to emergency events.

Table 6. Goal 4 recommendations.

Action	Description
4.1	<p><i>Incorporate agriculture in CVRD Community Climate Action planning initiatives and strategies.</i></p> <p>4.1.1 Acknowledge the connection between emergency preparedness and food supply reliability in CVRD climate change plans and strategies. This could involve providing an opportunity for CVFI and MIFI to provide input into the development of the documents and opportunity to provide input on early drafts.</p> <p>4.1.2 Recognize the local agri-food sector as part of the solution for mitigating impacts of climate change and the role a robust local food system plays in minimizing GHG emissions by reducing the transportation of food products (both inputs and outputs). This could involve ensuring that data used to develop a GHG profile of the agri-food sector includes all aspects of the food system, including the impact of importing foods from outside of the community.</p>
4.2	<p><i>Support sustainable farming practices and the protection of ecosystem services on farms.</i></p> <p>4.2.1 Encourage local farmers to participate in the Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) program, which is run by Investment Agriculture Foundation BC (IAFBC) and is free, voluntary, and confidential. Participating farms may be eligible for funding through IAFBC's Beneficial Management Practices program to implement sustainable farming practices and technologies.</p>

Action	Description
	<p>4.2.2 Provide information regarding farming practices that reduce GHG emissions through livestock and manure management, soil conservation and carbon sequestration, energy conservation and fuel switching as well as on-farm energy production.</p> <p>4.2.3 Support ecological goods and services developed for the agricultural sector. This could include supporting and distributing information about IAFBC's Farmland Advantage program and/or in-kind support in identifying qualifying farms.</p>
4.3	<p><i>Communicate with, and involve, the agricultural community in emergency preparedness planning.</i></p> <p>4.3.1 Work with CVFI and MIFI to undertake a regional asset mapping exercise and create an inventory of tools, equipment, and infrastructure available to the agricultural community during an emergency.</p> <p>4.3.2 Enhance on-farm emergency preparedness by ensuring producers are aware of existing risks, roles & responsibilities during an emergency. This may include both natural hazards (such as wildfires and floods) and biosecurity risks (such as livestock or crop disease). Emphasize that the responsibility for farm-level emergency planning, including safety, lies with the producer, and that livestock owners are responsible for their animals during an emergency. This underscores the importance of registering through AF's Premises ID program, no matter the size of the farm operation.</p> <p>4.3.3 Add emergency planning tools such as livestock farm "buddy systems" and the <i>Farm Flood Readiness Toolkit</i> to the CVRD website.</p> <p>4.3.4 Engage with producers when developing CVRD emergency plans.</p> <p>4.3.5 Continue to work interdepartmentally and with Provincial counterparts (such as AF's Emergency Management Branch) to ensure all parties have a shared understanding of the number and type of assets that can support an emergency response for agriculture as well as protocols and procedures for an emergency event.</p>
4.4	<p><i>Continue to support wildfire risk reduction initiatives with the agricultural community.</i></p> <p>4.4.1 Create a list of resources for farmers regarding best practices for land clearing, safe open burning techniques, and alternative waste disposal methods.</p> <p>4.4.2 Partner with CVRD Emergency Programs and provincial organizations (e.g. BC Wildfire Service) to host a workshop on fire risk management for the agricultural community at a time of year when farm operators are most available to participate (e.g. November/December).</p> <p>4.4.3 Advocate to MOTI that trees/vegetation within roadside Right of Ways are maintained to minimize the threat of fire and road blockages and facilitate such that the work can be undertaken in a timely fashion.</p>
4.5	<p><i>Increase solid waste management opportunities through burning alternatives (such as recycling and composting), and food waste reduction within the food system.</i></p> <p>4.5.1 Explore opportunities with Clean Farms for improved plastics recycling including silage bags, plastic feed bags, bale twine, hoses, and irrigation pipes & fittings, among other things.</p> <p>4.5.2 Continue to host pesticide, chemicals, and livestock medication round-up events in partnership with Clean Farms.</p> <p>4.5.3 Work with Recycle BC (Multi-Materials BC), Tire Stewardship BC, and others to assist with removal of recyclable materials including old tires in farming areas.</p> <p>4.5.4 Partner with Clean Farms and/or local recycling depot to launch a small-scale pilot project to recycle plastic bale wrap.</p> <p>4.5.5 Explore expansion of the Province's Extended Producer Responsibility program to provide additional waste diversion opportunities.</p>

Goal 5: Strengthen awareness of the local agri-food sector.

A strong local agri-food system greatly benefits from public knowledge and awareness of the hard work, dedication, and skill underlying a successful farm operation. The public also needs to know how to be a good neighbour to farm operations. While many residents suggest there is good local support for local food, the need for more educational resources for both producers and consumers were key concerns raised by the farming community in meetings and through the survey results. Building upon existing partnerships with other organizations and institutions is crucial in continuing to grow awareness around regional food and agriculture.

Table 7. Goal 5 recommendations.

Action #	Description
5.1	<p><i>Develop and maintain online agricultural resources that are readily available to the public.</i></p> <p>5.1.1 Create a one-stop landing webpage for agriculture and food related items on the CVRD website. Currently there are separate pages for the CVAP project and Food Hub project, but they are not explicitly linked. For examples see: Township of Langley; Alberni Clayoquot Regional District; Nanaimo Regional District; and Squamish Lillooet Regional District.</p> <p>5.1.2 Use GoogleMyMaps or another user-friendly online platform to present a visual representation of a regional food asset inventory. This could include an evolution of the current print-based Growers Guide and include both agriculture and aquaculture..</p> <p>5.1.3 Provide informational resources to the Real Estate Board, Association or directly to local realtor groups, to inform them and potential property buyers or developers about land use restrictions, normal farm practices, and the <i>Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act</i>. This may include The Countryside and You brochure.</p> <p>5.1.4 Provide informational resources to existing residents to convey the importance of agriculture and how to be a good neighbour to agricultural operations.</p> <p>5.1.5 Provide information on agriculture and its importance for the local economy and local food systems. This could include publishing infographics, videos, and other messaging through District communications channels.</p> <p>5.1.6 Export relevant data from the map to create an annual <i>Comox Valley Farm Guide</i> that includes any farms, farm stands and markets, & local food processors who wish to be listed.</p> <p>5.1.7 Expand the map database to include agricultural support services and share the map with interested parties, such as emergency preparedness and programming efforts.</p>
5.2	<p><i>Support Comox Valley Agri-Food tours.</i></p> <p>5.2.1 Reach out to K'ómoks regarding the possibility of partnering with CVRD staff and officials to create learning opportunities about traditional food harvesting and the impact that colonial agriculture and aquaculture has had on the region's food system.</p> <p>5.2.2 Work with Farmers Institutes and others to help fund, plan, promote, and host an annual tour that could focus on attracting a specific group audience and/or the public and include producers and processors in the tour stops. Consider developing self-guided options (in-person and video tours).</p> <p>5.2.3 Include an agri-food tour as a key part of on-boarding for new elected officials and staff.</p>
5.3	<p><i>Identify and support opportunities for school-aged children to learn about and engage in the food and agriculture system.</i></p> <p>5.3.1 Support schools, camps, and clubs in continued participation in the Farm 2 School, BC Fruit and Vegetable Program, and similar programs.</p>

Action #	Description
5.3.2	Encourage procurement partnerships between local farmers and schools to supply fresh food for breakfast, lunch, or snack programs.
5.3.3	Support the production of food on school grounds by providing soil or compost, fencing, small tools, or other infrastructure for these projects where possible.
5.3.4	Share existing educational materials for elementary, middle school, and high school students such as the online “Beef Production in BC” modules developed by the BC Cattlemen’s Association, and other resources developed by industry associations.

3. Prioritization of Actions

The recommended actions are presented using the following prioritization categories, which were assigned based on input from the farming community:

- Actions that are high priority that should commence as soon as possible and can be led by the CVRD.
- Actions that are high priority and require relationship-building with K’ómoks First Nation.
- Medium priority actions should commence within the next 5 years.
- Actions that should be completed within the next 2 years as the opportunity to do so arises (such as during a bylaw review or through leadership from a partner organization). If after two years the opportunity has not arisen then consider re-assigning to another priority level.
- Actions that have already begun but require ongoing support.

The actions are sorted by category and presented in the following tables in no particular order.

Table 8. Actions that are high priority and can be led by the CVRD.

Number	Description
1.1.3	Advocate to senior levels of government to reduce administrative and regulatory barriers to building on-farm water storage facilities
1.2.1	Identify and document existing needs to improve, extend, and maintain drainage ditch systems including flood gates within agricultural areas (such as the Courtenay Flats Drainage Service Area). Communicate these needs to Provincial and Federal levels of government.
1.2.3	Advocate to Provincial and Federal government agencies to provide the agricultural community with resources to improve drainage infrastructure, ditch clearing, maintenance, and upgrades
1.3.4	Advocate for agricultural water licences to be fast-tracked through FrontCounterBC.
1.3.6	Ensure that the collection and tracking of water use data by the CVRD is effectively communicated to illustrate the impact of different land uses on water resources.
1.3.7	Develop clear communications regarding the CVRD’s role and regulatory abilities with regards to issuing residential building permits, water sources, and watershed planning.
2.1.1	Continue to commit resources to the Agricultural Coordinator position.
2.1.3	Meet with representatives from CVFI and MIFI to ensure that the Agricultural Coordinator position is designed to support both organizations but is firmly embedded within CVRD staff and not cross-appointed to other organizations.
2.2.1	Examine the current Terms of Reference of the CVRD’s Agricultural Advisory Planning Commission (APC), which currently is limited to reviewing applications and advising the Board on agricultural

	matters. Consider expanding the role of the APC to that of an Advisory Committee, with the ability to complete tasks, manage a budget, facilitate cross-organizational communication, and take on a role in overseeing the implementation of the CVAP.
3.1.1	Re-assess the feasibility work completed to date on the re-development of the CVEX site to ensure a priority is placed on infrastructure for a year-round permanent farmers market.
4.3.1	Work with CVFI and MIFI to undertake a regional asset mapping exercise and create an inventory of tools, equipment, and infrastructure available to the agricultural community during an emergency.
4.3.2	Enhance on-farm emergency preparedness by ensuring producers are aware of existing risks, roles & responsibilities during an emergency. Emphasize that the responsibility for farm-level emergency planning lies with the producer, and that livestock owners are responsible for their animals during an emergency, which underscores the importance of registering through AF's Premises ID program, no matter the size of the farm operation.
4.3.3	Add emergency planning tools such as livestock farm "buddy systems" and the <i>Farm Flood Readiness Toolkit</i> to the CVRD website.
4.4.1	Create a list of resources for farmers regarding best practices for land clearing, safe open burning techniques, and alternative waste disposal methods.
5.1.1	Create a one-stop landing webpage for agriculture and food related items on the CVRD website. Currently there are separate pages for the CVAP project and Food Hub project, but they are not explicitly linked.

Table 9. Actions that are high priority and require relationship-building with K'ómoks First Nation.

Number	Description
1.3.1	Work with K'ómoks First Nation to identify areas of shared management and interest in water stewardship.
1.3.2	Explore the opportunity to develop a regional Watershed Sustainability Plan.
1.3.5	Implement the recommended actions published in the TRAWP.
3.3.3	Identify shared interest, common ground, and potential assets for regional food infrastructure with K'ómoks First Nation.
3.4.1	Work with key regional collaborators to develop a regional Food Security Plan that would align with the CVAP and other CVRD plans. The plan should ensure that equity-seeking/deserving groups (e.g. seniors, youth, single parent families, refugees, and new residents) are engaged in identifying challenges and opportunities for improving household food security.
5.2.1	Reach out to K'ómoks regarding the possibility of partnering with CVRD staff and officials to create learning opportunities about traditional food harvesting and the impact that colonial agriculture and aquaculture has had on the region's food system.

Table 10. Medium priority actions that should commence within the next 5 years.

Number	Description
1.2.2	Partner with DFO, ENV, and AF to host educational events that examine drainage issues on farmland and scenarios that may, or may not, require permitting and authorizations.
2.3.1	Develop communications that can be distributed by CVRD and member municipalities' building permitting offices to ALR landowners and developers regarding the legislated restrictions on development on ALR land.

2.3.2	Work with the ALC to develop and resource a coordinated joint compliance and enforcement strategy for land within the ALR to prioritize and address ongoing issues over the longer term.
2.3.3	Work with partners to identify enforcement issues on non-ALR farmland. This could include training and education for the CVRD's and municipal permitting departments regarding ALR development restrictions.
2.4.2	Consider adopting building setbacks on non-ALR properties that are adjacent to ALR land in an effort to reduce conflicts between neighbours.
2.4.7	Review and evaluate the Farmland Protection Development Guidelines to determine if adjustments should be made to improve effectiveness.
2.4.8	Advocate to the province to modernize taxation policies to stimulate agricultural production.
3.1.2	Meet with the CVFMA, CVFI, and MIFI to initiate a process around establishing multiple location(s) for local food pop-up markets, and other avenues for regional producers to connect with consumers.
3.2.1	Using the Census of Agriculture, BC Assessment, and the ALUI as a baseline, investigate the true economic value of the regional agri-food sector (including aquaculture) such as gross revenues, labour, and secondary services. The recent BC Farmers Market Economic Impact Study can also be used to inform this work.
3.2.2	Work with BC Transit and CVRD staff to seize opportunities to increase transit services to rural areas to facilitate farmworker commutes, particularly during evenings and weekends.
3.2.3	Explore innovative opportunities or practices within CVRD's jurisdiction to support new entrants into joining the agri-food marketplace and maintain (or increase) the productivity of ALR land, such as purchasing land to develop and incubate farm businesses and lease land to new farmers.
3.3.1	Consider CVEX in the establishment of a regional Agricultural Service, or as an anchor asset. This could involve developing a specific list of needs and wants from the agricultural community at the CVEX location (e.g. an agriculture centre, permanent market space, feed / hay storage, seed saving, shared processing space, etc.)
3.4.2	Consider both household and community food security by examining policies and strategies that local governments and regional entities can adopt to support better access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate foods.
3.4.3	Consider incorporating food waste reduction and food recovery into a regional solid waste management plan. This could involve partnering with local organizations such as Lush Valley, Second Harvest, Fishes and Loaves, CVFMA, and others. Strategies to minimize food waste at different stages of production, distribution, and consumption could be included.
4.5.1	Explore opportunities with Clean Farms for improved plastics recycling including silage bags, plastic feed bags, bale twine, hoses, and irrigation pipes & fittings, among other things.
4.5.4	Partner with Clean Farms and/or local recycling depot to launch a small-scale pilot project to recycle plastic bale wrap.
4.5.5	Explore expansion of the Province's Extended Producer Responsibility program to provide additional waste diversion opportunities.
5.1.2	Use GoogleMyMaps or another user-friendly online platform to present a visual representation of a regional food asset inventory. This could include an evolution of the current print-based Growers Guide and include both agriculture and aquaculture.
5.1.5	Provide information on agriculture and its importance for the local economy and local food systems. This could include publishing infographics, videos, and other messaging through District communications channels.
5.1.6	Export relevant data from the GoogleMyMap to create an annual <i>Comox Valley Farm Guide</i> that includes any farms, farm stands and markets, & local food processors who wish to be listed.
5.1.7	Expand the GoogleMyMap database to include agricultural support services and share the map with interested parties, such as emergency preparedness and programming efforts.

Table 11. Actions that can be completed as the opportunity arises within the next 2 years.

Number	Description
1.1.4	Provide information regarding funding opportunities and other resources for alternative water collection and on-farm storage.
1.1.2	Support AF, industry groups, and farmers institutes in sharing construction requirements for on-farm water storage and any vendor lists that are developed by these agencies.
1.3.3	Work with AF to update the ALUI and associated Agricultural Water Demand Model on a regular basis (e.g., every 10 years) to obtain a more accurate estimate of agricultural water needs.
1.4.1	Consult with the agricultural community if/when a regional watershed stewardship service is being developed.
2.3.4	Foster partnerships between Electoral Areas and municipalities to create effective urban-agricultural interfaces that are maintained under development pressures.
2.4.3	Ensure land use designations and zoning tools indicate support for farms located outside the ALR and provide similar benefits (such as farm stands).
2.4.4	Update the Zoning Bylaw with ALC policies and regulations for ALR lands. This will require an assessment as to whether or not to match the number and maximum size of dwellings with current provincial regulations, or to impose additional restrictions.
2.4.5	When updating the OCP and/or Zoning Bylaw, follow ALC and AF requirements and guidelines regarding residential uses on farmland. The ALC's Guide to Bylaw Development in Farming Areas and AF's Guide to Edge Planning are key resources regarding residential footprints and maximum setbacks.
2.4.6	Refer draft RGS, OCP, and zoning bylaw amendments to the ALC for review.
2.5.3	Support the work of external agencies to further reduce conflicts between farms and trail users
3.1.3	Help promote the Farmers Market Coupon program.
3.3.4	Work with the Farmers Institutes to secure funds and/or financing from grants or lending agencies for new agri-business ventures. This could include offering letters of support.
4.1.1	Acknowledge the connection between emergency preparedness and food supply reliability in CVRD climate change plans and strategies. This could involve providing an opportunity for CVFI and MIFI to provide input into the development of the documents and opportunity to provide input on early drafts.
4.1.2	Recognize the local agri-food sector as part of the solution for mitigating impacts of climate change and the role a robust local food system plays in minimizing GHG emissions by reducing the transportation of food products (both inputs and outputs). This could involve ensuring that data used to develop a GHG profile of the agri-food sector includes all aspects of the food system, including the impact of importing foods from outside of the community.
4.2.1	Encourage local farmers to participate in the Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) program, which is run by Investment Agriculture Foundation BC (IAFBC) and is free, voluntary, and confidential. Participating farms may be eligible for funding through IAFBC's Beneficial Management Practices program to implement sustainable farming practices and technologies.
4.2.2	Provide information regarding farming practices that reduce GHG emissions through livestock and manure management, soil conservation and carbon sequestration, energy conservation and fuel switching as well as on-farm energy production.
4.2.3	Support ecological goods and services developed for the agricultural sector. This could include supporting and distributing information about IAFBC's Farmland Advantage program and/or in-kind support in identifying qualifying farms.
4.3.4	Engage with producers when developing CVRD emergency plans.
4.3.5	Continue to work interdepartmentally and with Provincial counterparts (such as AF's Emergency Management Branch) to ensure all parties have a shared understanding of the number and type of

	assets that can support an emergency response for agriculture as well as protocols and procedures for an emergency event.
4.4.3	Advocate to MOTI that trees/vegetation within roadside Right of Ways are maintained to minimize the threat of fire and road blockages.
4.5.3	Work with Recycle BC (Multi-Materials BC), Tire Stewardship BC, and others to assist with removal of recyclable materials including old tires in farming areas.
5.1.3	Provide informational resources to the Real Estate Board, Association or directly to local realtor groups, to inform them and potential property buyers or developers about land use restrictions, normal farm practices, and the <i>Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act</i> . This may include The Countryside and You brochure.
5.1.4	Provide informational resources to existing residents to convey the importance of agriculture and how to be a good neighbour to agricultural operations.
5.2.3	Include an agri-food tour as a key part of on-boarding for new elected officials and staff.
5.3.1	Support schools, camps, and clubs in continued participation in the Farm 2 School, BC Fruit and Vegetable Program, and similar programs.
5.3.2	Encourage procurement partnerships between local farmers and schools to supply fresh food for breakfast, lunch, or snack programs.
5.3.4	Share existing educational materials for elementary, middle school, and high school students such as the online “Beef Production in BC” modules developed by the BC Cattlemen’s Association, and other resources developed by industry associations.

Table 12. Actions that are already underway.

Number	Description
1.1.1	Continue to encourage the Ministry of Agriculture and Food (AF) to run workshops regarding dugouts, storage ponds, rainwater collection tanks, and other forms of water storage.
2.1.2	Develop a clear description of the role and responsibilities of the Agricultural Coordinator position. The implementation of many of the actions in this plan could form the basis for the job description.
2.4.1	Continue to recognize agriculture (including land-based aquaculture) as a priority use within the ALR, restricting non-farm uses.
2.5.1	Document conflicts that producers experience with trail users, particularly impacts from unleashed dogs and trespassers.
2.5.2	Continue to install fencing along Right of Ways between trails and farms to protect both livestock, wildlife, and pets, as needed.
3.3.2	Continue to work with industry and community interests around establishing shared food infrastructure facilities in the Comox Valley.
4.4.2	Partner with CVRD Emergency Programs and provincial organizations (e.g. BC Wildfire Service) to host a workshop on fire risk management for the agricultural community at a time of year when farm operators are most available to participate (e.g. November/December).
4.5.2	Continue to host pesticide, chemicals, and livestock medication round-up events in partnership with Clean Farms.
5.2.2	Work with Farmers Institutes and others to help fund, plan, promote, and host an annual tour that could focus on attracting a specific group audience and/or the public and include producers and processors in the tour stops. Consider developing self-guided options (in-person and video tours).
5.3.3	Support the production of food on school grounds by providing soil or compost, fencing, small tools, or other infrastructure for these projects where possible.

4. Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

A monitoring and evaluation framework is helpful in guiding progress of the implementation of CVAP actions and in measuring success. Where relevant, current performance indicators used by the CVRD can be incorporated. Table 12 presents descriptions of six indicators along with examples of success (what is being measured), evaluation mechanisms (how it is being measured), and data sources for each.

The indicators are presented as “performance” or “process” related:

- “Performance” indicators note the overall success of the plan as actions play out on the ground.
- “Process” indicators” signal the overall implementation of specific actions over time.

Table 13. Monitoring and Evaluation: Performance Indicators.

Indicator	Measure of Success	Evaluation Mechanism	Data source	Frequency of Reporting	Baseline Data
Performance Indicators					
1. Total farmed area and number of farms (on ALR and outside ALR)	Increase in farm activity on parcels available for farming.	Track the area of farmland under production: - Total area in production - Average # of acres/farm - # of farms year over year	Farm classified area from Statistics Canada Census of Agriculture BC Assessment ALUI updates	5 years	2013 ALUI 2021 Census of Agriculture 2023 BC Assessment
2. Integrity of the ALR and agriculturally-zoned lands	Number of hectares has been maintained in ALR and other zones designated as agriculture.	Comparison of ALR characteristics over time: - ALR application decisions	ALC website Development application data from CVRD	Annually	2013 ALUI ALC website Zoning changes to agricultural land in CVRD.
3. Increased water resilience	Number of farms that have on-farm water storage.	Communication with farmers and with AF.	Farming community survey AF	Annually	Not yet available

Table 14. Monitoring and Evaluation: Process Indicators.

Indicator	Measure of Success	Evaluation Mechanism	Data source	Frequency of Reporting	Baseline Data
Process Indicators					
4. Number of educational events hosted with the	An increase in events held in the agriculture and food sector.	Comparison of event numbers annually.	Farmers Institutes, AF, and CVRD events calendars.	Annually	MIFI, CVFI, AF CVRD websites and staff.

agriculture and food sector.					
5. Number of CVAP recommended actions completed	50% of actions completed within 5 years of adoption (Excluding ongoing actions)	Tracking of actions completed over time.	Updates and amendments to bylaws and other CVRD policies. Any new projects emerging from the CVAP.	Annually	An evaluation of the actions completed to date.
6. Number of CVAP community plans that intersect with agriculture	100% of new plans endorsed or adopted include local agricultural perspectives.	Tracking of the engagement and final recommendations of new plans, such as: - Climate change action plan - Tourism plan - Transportation plan - Others	CVRD plans	Annually	An evaluation of plans completed to date.
7. Annual Budget allowance for continued CVAP implementation	Budget allocated each year for CVAP implementation.	Track budget allocations for CVAP actions as well as budget for specific projects related to CVAP actions.	CVRD Board commitments for budget.	Annually	CVRD budget commitments for 2024-2025.

Appendix I: Glossary

Agriculture

Agriculture can be defined as the systematic and controlled use of living organisms and the environment to improve the human condition. Sustainable agriculture enhances environmental quality and the resource base on which it depends; provides for basic human food and fiber needs; is economically viable; and enhances the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole over the long term.

Agricultural Land

According to the *Agriculture Land Commission Act* (the "ALC Act") agricultural land is the land resource upon which agriculture takes place due to its ability to grow food products. The agricultural land resource and the products that can be grown are based on a soils and climate combination which can vary across the landscape. Although agricultural land is primarily required for the production of food for human and animal consumption, agricultural activities also include the growing of plants for fibre and fuels (including wood), and for other organically derived non-food products (e.g. pharmaceuticals, etc).

Food Hub

A strategically located facility with a business management structure facilitating the aggregation, storage, processing, distribution, and/or marketing of locally/regionally produced food products. Food hub refers to both facilities that distributes food to increase food security in the community and/or facilities that are set up to provide small farmers access to a market they would normally have be able to access.

Food Security

Food security exists when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious, affordable food to maintain a healthy and active life. (World Health Organization).

Food System

A sustainable community food system is a collaborative network that integrates sustainable food production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste management in order to enhance the environmental, economic and social health of a particular place. Farmers, consumers and communities partner to create a more locally based, self-reliant food economy. (Gafsi, Mohamed, & Favreau, Jean Luc. (2013). Indicator-Based Method for Assessing Organic Farming Sustainability. Methods and Procedures for Building Sustainable Farming Systems)

Resilient/Resilience

The ability to anticipate risk, limit or mitigate impacts, and adapt, evolve and grow when faced with change. A resilient community is self-reliant and ensures those most in need have access to essential services such as food, housing, water, and energy to support ongoing social, economic and environmental health.

Appendix II: Recommendations for OCP, Zoning Bylaw, and Development Permit Guidelines Updates

Opportunities for updates include:

- Continue to permit agriculture uses on non-ALR land, where appropriate (e.g. institutional).
- Consider any special provisions for agriculture outside of the ALR, where needed (e.g. hen-keeping, watering for gardens).
- Flexible language and definitions that support innovative and emerging food production methods (e.g., agroforestry, rooftop gardens, aquaponics, community greenhouses) in specific zones as appropriate.
- Encourage the location of enclosed growing systems in non-ALR areas (e.g. light industrial, commercial) through zoning.
- Facilitate the establishment of appropriately scaled value-added processing and retail activities in industrial zoned areas and on farmland when in alignment with ALC policies and regulations.
- Provide an update to Section 85 of the Rural Comox Valley OCP No 337, *Farmland protection development permit area*, to include a reference to the *Guide for Subdivision Near Agriculture (2024)*.
- Provide an update to the development permit area guidelines to reflect best practices for minimizing conflicts between agricultural land (ALR and zones where agriculture is permitted) and other land uses.

Appendix III: Scope of Work for an Agricultural Coordinator Position

In 2022, the CVRD conducted an 18-month pilot to establish an Agricultural Coordinator position to provide a conduit between the agricultural community and the CVRD. During this pilot phase, many things were learned regarding how to strengthen the role in order to have more positive impact. Overall, the recommendation is to ensure that the CVRD continues to support the Agricultural Coordinator role, regardless as to whether or not a regional agricultural service is established.

1. Overall Function of the Agricultural Coordinator Position

There are several models for an Agricultural Coordinator role that can be considered. Local governments such as the Bulkley-Nechako Regional District, Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District, Metro Vancouver, and the Capital Regional District all employ an Agriculture or Food Security Planner or Coordinator position. Based on feedback from the Comox Valley community, the Agricultural Coordinator should focus on facilitating communication and engagement between the CVRD and the agricultural community in order to coordinate efforts towards growing and maintaining a strong agriculture sector.

2. Scope Areas of the Agricultural Coordinator Position

a. Provide a conduit and liaison with the agricultural community:

- i. Help to provide information on existing policies and regulations to producers.
- ii. Build and foster relationships within the agriculture industry as well as other businesses in the food and agriculture value chain (e.g. processors, distributors, aggregators, retailers).
- iii. Increase flow of information to and from the agriculture community and the CVRD (staff and elected officials).
- iv. Support the development of a regional agricultural service, should one be established.
- v. Coordinate CVRD participation and involvement in farm tours and other special events related to agriculture.

b. Act as an internal resource on agriculture:

- i. Help to create and maintain a consistent framework for agriculture within the suite of statutory and non-statutory plans and strategies of the CVRD (e.g. vision, strategic directions and initiatives, policy and plan development).
- ii. Ensure that information regarding funding opportunities are clearly and efficiently shared with producers.

c. Support external communication on agriculture:

- i. Develop CVRD website updates.
- ii. Promote special events related to agriculture.
- iii. Initiate agricultural celebration and passive education projects.
- iv. Maintain a contact database of regional producers to be used in promoting engagement and other events.
- v. Work with communications staff to develop social media that can be used by producers to promote events.

- d. **Support emergency preparedness and response:**
 - i. Support producer education initiatives.
 - ii. Coordinate with other bodies to identify assets and protocols for an emergency response.
 - iii. Support communications, coordination and outreach during emergency events.
- e. **Support communication with other regions and senior levels of government**
 - i. Liaise with AF and the ALC to ensure a smooth flow of information and resources.
 - ii. Partner and participate on AF and Agriculture & Agri-Food Canada initiatives to ensure that decision making around insurance and compensation programs related to drought and weather impacts are inclusive of regional Comox Valley farms and agriculture.
 - iii. Liaise with other regional districts on issues of mutual interest.
 - iv. Provide a staff point of contact for K'omoks First Nation.
 - v. Lead the agricultural community through new and ongoing emergency preparedness initiatives as the local and provincial government levels.
- f. **Oversee any studies, programs, or processes related to agriculture including:**
 - i. Agri-food sector strategy and marketing plan.
 - ii. Regional Food Security Plan.
 - iii. Feasibility study for potential Agricultural Service.
 - iv. Integration with potential regional watershed stewardship service.
 - v. Solid Waste Management Plan including recycling, composting, and alternatives to burning.
 - vi. Outreach on on-site water storage.

3. Ways for the CVRD to support the Agricultural Coordinator Position

- Develop external communication supports, such as key messages and potential supports the CVRD can provide, to enable the Coordinator to communicate more effectively with community.
- Normalize the position within the CVRD staff structure, with CVRD email and business cards.
- Provide a discretionary budget for honoraria, prizes, meeting refreshments, and other incentives to thank and recognize producers for their contributions on committees, in engagement etc.
- Allow for interns to provide summer support to the Agriculture Coordinator.
- Establish a regular update, information sharing, and reporting structure between the Agriculture Coordinator and other CVRD staff and elected officials.

4. Further considerations

- Identify strategies to address inter-regional issues and key players.
- Identify roles for the Agriculture Coordinator position within an Agriculture Service vs. business as usual.

Appendix IV: Considerations for a Regional Agricultural Service

During producer and community engagement as well as through feedback from the EASC, it was indicated that there was interest in exploring what role a regional agriculture service could have in implementing many of the actions in the CVAP. At a basic level, an agriculture service would be akin to a waste management service in the sense it would be established as an internal function and direct service of the CVRD. The service would work specifically around agriculture interests, assets, and issues. There are many iterations of what an agriculture service could look like and how it could function. One scenario could be for the agriculture service to function as a farm-extension service that would work with and support producers around regulation compliance, urban rural conflicts, market research, crop planning, land use in areas that permit agriculture, and emergency preparedness and response, among other areas. This would be similar to AF's Regional Agrologist role in supporting extension to producers regarding provincial legislation and programs, albeit at a local government level.

Creating a new service within a regional district is a major undertaking, therefore, if undertaken, a phased approach is suggested as a way for the CVRD to take initial steps towards understanding what roles and responsibilities a regional agriculture service could undertake, in addition to how it would be structured and resourced. Suggested steps are described below.

Step 1: Engage experts and the agriculture community in identifying *what* an agriculture service would do.

- Engage with the agricultural community to identify and design key opportunities for a regional agriculture service, in addition to what has already been identified in the CVAP. This could be aligned with elements of a regional watershed stewardship service.
- Identify which CVAP recommended actions could be implemented under the purview of a regional agriculture service.
- Consider the needs of both larger farm operations as well as smaller farms when exploring the role of the regional agriculture service.
- Identify examples from other jurisdictions that are comparable to CVRD (e.g. Bulkley Valley Regional District; Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District; District of Squamish and Squamish Lillooet Regional District; Southern Gulf Islands).
- Consider opportunities for collaboration on a shared agriculture service between regional districts.

Step 2: Work with CVRD staff and the agricultural community to identify *how* an agriculture service would work.

- Scope the role and responsibilities of the regional agriculture service to determine the internal structuring, resourcing, and management needs.
- Meet with CVFI, MIFI, and CVFMA to discuss a possible governance structure for the service.
- Based on results of the discussions, determine if an agriculture service is feasible for the CVRD.

Step 3: Take action based on sound and robust information and shared understanding.

- If the service is deemed feasible, then undertake steps to formalize and promote the regional agriculture service, possibly as a pilot project to be phased in after early testing. Ensure that monitoring and evaluation frameworks are established and used to understand the performance of the service and how to embrace adaptive management to strengthen and optimize the service over-time.
- If the service is not deemed feasible, then clarify how the CVAP will be implemented within the existing structure of the CVRD and the roles of the Agricultural Coordinator / Staff, other CVRD staff, the agricultural advisory body, and elected officials.

Appendix V: Funding Opportunities

In order to implement the recommendations presented above, funding will need to be sourced. While some funding may be allocated through the CVRD, outside sources of funding have been identified to support specific initiatives within the implementation plan. Information on current funding opportunities is provided below. Note that funding programs are continually evolving and will need to be monitoring on a regular basis.

Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC

The Investment Agriculture Foundation (IAFBC) is an industry-led, not-for-profit organization that delivers government-funded programs to the agriculture and agri-food sector of British Columbia. Project funding is available in a variety of areas from supporting local marketing or export initiatives, to enhancing environmental sustainability, to developing a new product or process and more. Visit www.iafbc.ca for more information.

Real Estate Foundation of BC

The Real Estate Foundation of BC (REFBC) is a philanthropic organization based in BC that supports land use and real estate practices that contribute to resilient, healthy communities and natural environments. The grant program supports non-profit organizations (charities, societies, NGOs, universities and colleges, local and regional governments, First Nations) working to improve BC communities and natural environments through responsible and informed land use, conservation, and real estate practices. Grants support projects, initiatives, and sustainable solutions that address current land use challenges and help communities to plan for the future. More information and past projects can be found on REF's grants website at <http://www.refbc.com/grants>.

Local Food Infrastructure Fund

Agriculture Canada provides this fund to support activities directly related to food production for equity-deserving groups. For example, building a community garden with an irrigation system, installing a greenhouse with solar panels, or establishing a food forest. Eligible applicants include local governments. Eligible activities are restricted to the purchase and installation of equipment to produce food (such as, equipment to grow and/or harvest food) or equipment to process, distribute, store, and/or transport food, when the project includes a food production element. <https://agriculture.canada.ca/en/programs>