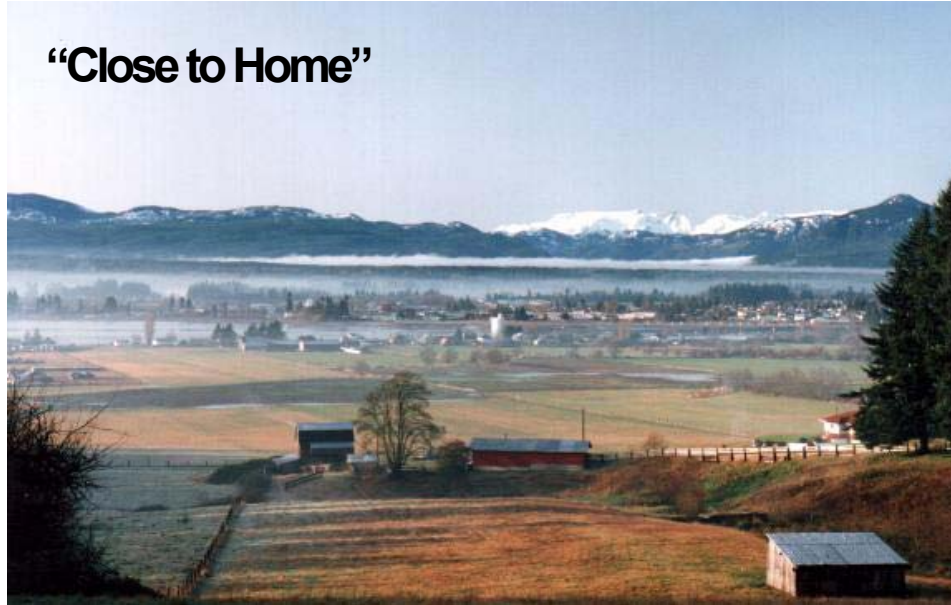


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# Comox Valley Agricultural Plan

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**“Close to Home”**



Prepared for:



**November 25, 2002**

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# COMOX VALLEY AGRICULTURAL PLAN

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The agricultural sector in the Comox Valley, the province and Canada has changed dramatically over the last 50 years. Technology, consumer demands, new crops, marketing structures, reduced profit margins, threats to the resource base from urban and other development, trade, environmental and agricultural support policies and programs and a host of other factors have radically transformed the industry.

While the “family farm” is still generally held as the “ideal” for the industry, the forces of change have pushed most Canadian farms into an “agro-industrial” model that emphasizes large, highly mechanized, globally competitive “factory” farms. However, in the Comox Valley, the small farm sector has continued to grow based on combining farm and off-farm incomes, and focussing on local markets. For example, the number of farms of less than 28 ha. increased by 14% between 1991 and 2001 in the Regional District of Comox-Strathcona.

In February 2001, the Regional District of Comox-Strathcona (RDCS) formally initiated the process of preparing an Agricultural Plan for the Comox Valley. The planning area includes Electoral Areas A, B, C and part of Electoral Area D (The Oyster River Research Farm), of the Regional District of Comox-Strathcona (See Map 1.) For the purposes of this Plan, the Study Area and the Comox Valley are synonymous.

## 2. PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

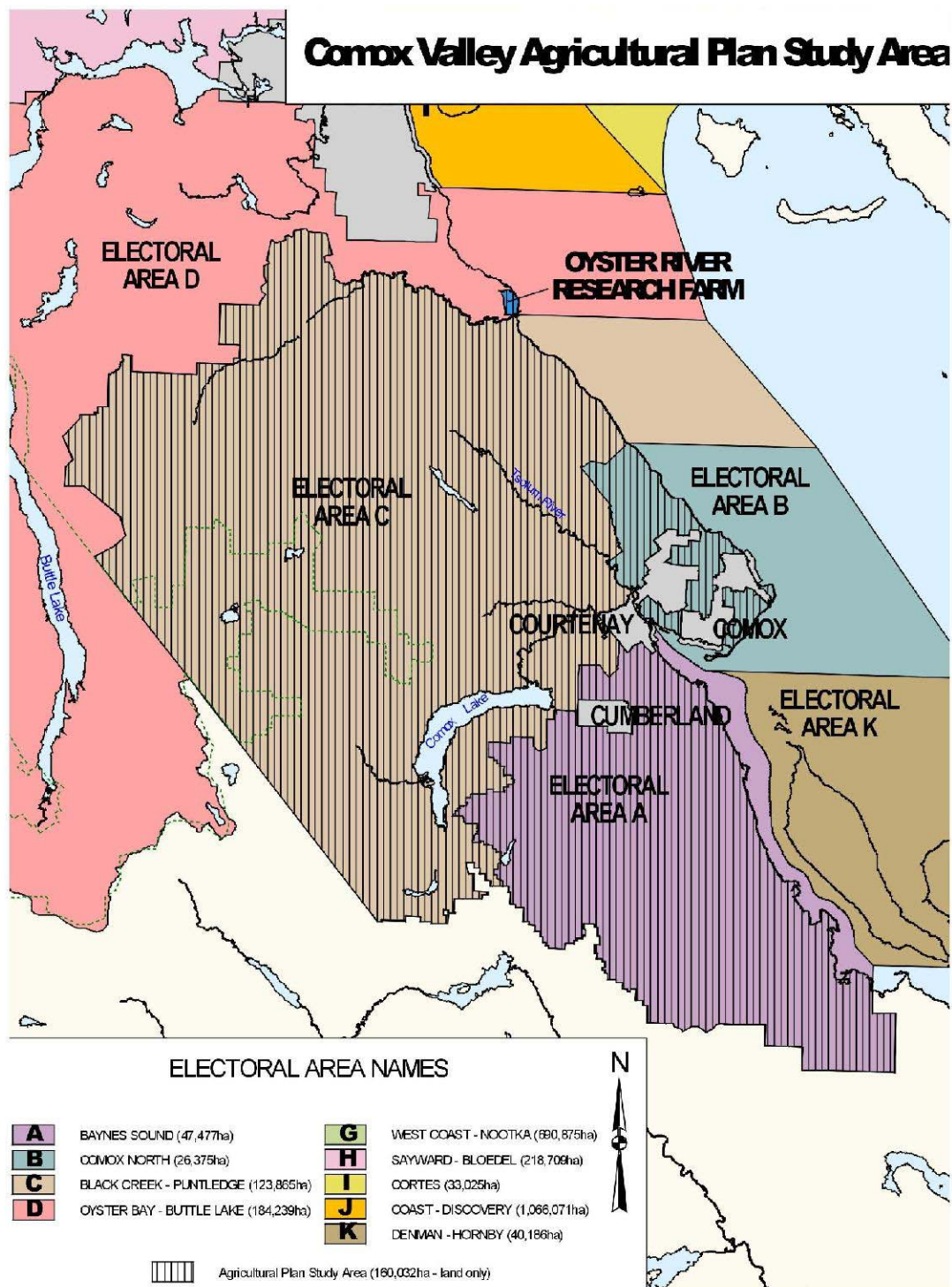
The Terms of Reference for the Plan were developed by the Regional District of Comox-Strathcona, in conjunction with the study funding partners:

- the BC Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries
- the BC Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women’s Services,
- the B.C. Investment Agriculture Foundation, and
- the Comox Valley agricultural community through the Farmers Institute.

The purpose of the Plan as stated in the Terms of Reference is:

***To further the development of socially, culturally, environmentally and economically sustainable farming.***

**Figure 1: Map of the Study Area**



### 3. GOALS OF THE PLAN AND PLANNING PROCESS

The four key goals of the plan<sup>1</sup> are to:

1. Identify the current agricultural situation in the Comox Valley.
2. Create more educated and self-aware governments and public in regards to the agricultural food system in the Comox Valley.
3. Identify relationships between agricultural and other land uses for the purpose of promoting healthy relationships between agriculture and its neighbours.
4. Write an agricultural plan that furthers the development of socially/culturally, environmentally and economically sustainable farming in the plan area.

The objectives of the overall project and related studies are to:

- Determine the current status of the Comox Valley agriculture industry and resource base;
- Identify the opportunities and constraints facing agriculture;
- Identify potential strategies to address challenges and take advantage of opportunities;
- Present innovative suggestions/ideas for developing a strong agricultural industry;

- Recommend priorities, actions, and participants to successfully achieve solutions, and to promote agriculture by:
  - generating public awareness of its value in the region; and
  - identifying career and business opportunities.
- Establish a monitoring process that:
  - measures ongoing progress towards plan implementation; and
  - maintains an activity inventory of the agricultural sector in the community.
- Include the farm community, the general public and community organizations in the planning process.

**Figure 2: Comox Valley Agriculture**



<sup>1</sup> Goals and objectives are based on the Terms of Reference for this project  
November 25, 2002

#### 4. THE PROCESS USED TO DEVELOP THE PLAN

The planning process was directed by a Steering Committee of local government, agency, and farm community representatives (see Appendix A). The planning process had two Phases.

**Figure 3: The Plan Process**

<b><u>Phase 1</u></b>	<b><u>Phase 2</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Develop Background Report</li><li>- Conduct Focus Groups</li><li>- Develop Issues and Opportunities Report</li><li>- Develop Information Brochures</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Public Open House and meeting</li><li>- Agency and Organization consultation</li><li>- Conduct Focus groups</li><li>- Develop Draft Plan</li><li>- Public review at Fall Fair, Open House and Meeting</li><li>- Agency and Organization consultation</li><li>- Develop Final Plan</li></ul>

##### **Phase 1**

The goal of Phase 1 was to develop an information base and a common understanding of the issues and opportunities facing agriculture in the study area. The results are included in *Phase 1: Report 1 - History and Resources*. In addition, a review of other agricultural strategies in the province, four focus groups and several meetings with the Steering Committee helped identify the key issues and opportunities that the Plan should address. The results of that consultation and review are included in *Phase 1: Report 2 - Issues and Opportunities*. A summary of key issues and opportunities is attached as Appendix B.

Both of the Phase 1 Reports are available from the Regional District of Comox-Strathcona, and are currently available on the Regional District web site <http://www.rdcs.bc.ca>

Two information brochures, one to provide information on agriculture in the Valley and another to provide information for rural residents about farming in their community, were developed. These brochures are available from the Regional District of Comox-Strathcona and are also currently available on the Regional District web site.

##### **Phase 2**

The focus of Phase 2 was to develop strategies addressing the issues and opportunities identified in Phase 1. Phase 2 started with a public Open House to review and get community comments on the results of Phase 1. A meeting was held with a group of representatives from agencies and organizations that would be most likely to be involved in the implementation of the recommendations in the final Plan.

Those two steps helped clarify and prioritize issues and opportunities. Meetings were also conducted with three focus groups to gather suggestions on how those priority issues and opportunities should be addressed. The results were reviewed by the Steering Committee. Based on their input, a Draft Plan was developed. The Draft Plan was then reviewed by the Steering Committee, and by the public at the Comox Valley Fall Fair and at a second Open House held in October, 2002. The Draft Plan was also reviewed with representatives of agencies and organizations. Based on the comments received from this review process, the Final Plan was completed in November, 2002.

## 5. AGRICULTURE IN THE COMOX VALLEY

The Phase 1 Report of this Plan (noted above) provides detailed information about the agricultural industry in the Comox Valley. Following is a summary of some of the key findings of Phase 1.

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### ***Where is the Comox Valley Agricultural Plan Area?***

- The Comox Valley Agricultural Plan Area is located in the south-eastern portion of Regional District of Comox-Strathcona. It extends from Deep Bay in the south, to the Oyster River, and Oyster River Research Farm in the North, and from the Strait of Georgia to the Beaufort Range.
- The Valley covers an area of 1,733.5 square kilometres and has an estimated population of 52,399 comprised of 32,904 in the municipalities of Comox, Courtenay and Cumberland, and approximately 20,305 in Electoral Area A, B, and C (2001).

### ***Agriculture has a long history in the Comox Valley***

- Richard C. Mayne visited the “Valley” in 1860 and recognized its agricultural potential. Within 3 years, 60 settlers were drawn here by the fertile soils and favourable climate. Since then, Valley agriculture has demonstrated its strength and resiliency in the face of technological, marketing and “globalization” changes.

### ***Agriculture in the Comox Valley is growing***

- In 2001, there were 300 census farms<sup>2</sup> on a total area of 9,633 ha in the Comox Valley. In contrast, the 1991 census reported 284 farms totalling 7,277 ha. The number of farms, and the area farmed have increased by 6% and 32% respectively over the last 10 years. Most of the farming activity in the RDCS takes place in the Comox Valley.

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<sup>2</sup> In 1996 and 2001, a census farm was defined as an agricultural operation that produces at least one of the following products intended for sale: crops (hay, field crops, tree fruits or nuts, berries or grapes, vegetables, seed); livestock (cattle, pigs, sheep, horses, game animals, other livestock); poultry (hens, chickens, turkeys, chicks, game birds, other poultry); animal products (milk or cream, eggs, wool, furs, meat); or other agricultural products (Christmas trees, greenhouse or nursery products, mushrooms, sod, honey, maple syrup products).

***The Comox Valley has a productive resource base***

***The Valley has a favourable climate***

***Quality soils are protected by the ALR and local planning***

***There is an active local farming community and local support***

- Soils in the Comox Valley have high capability ratings, with three main limitations: acidity (require lime), moisture deficiency (60% require irrigation), excess wetness (25% require drainage) or both wetness and summer aridity (15%)
- The Valley has warm, dry summers (July avg. high 22.5 °C) and short, mild wet winters (January, avg. low -0.3 °C)
- Hours of bright sunshine at the Comox Airport averaged 1938.6 hours between 1987 and 1997, compared to 1919.2 hours at Vancouver International Airport.
- Average precipitation is 1187 mm per year in Comox and 1489 mm per year in Cumberland. Average monthly rainfall is less than 50 mm from May to September.
- The Valley has 20,000 hectares of land in the ALR.
- Most of this land is designated for agricultural use by the Rural Comox Valley Official Community Plan.
- Only 24% of the parcels in the ALR are used to produce enough products to qualify for the BC Assessment Authority's 'Farm Class'.
- Only 1/2 of the land in the ALR is currently used for agricultural production based on Census data.
- Cleared land prices range from \$5,000 to \$20,000 per ha (for parcels over 10 ha) to \$25,000 to \$50,000 per ha (for smaller parcels of 2 to 4 ha)
- The Comox Valley Farmers' Market operates twice a week from April to December with 50 to 60 vendors.
- Several grocery "chain" stores and independent grocers in the Valley sell local products.



## 6. KEY ASSUMPTIONS AND CHALLENGES

- Change in the current situation is either necessary or desired. Farmers are not happy with the “status quo” in terms of issues such as irrigation and drainage.
- A Plan is an agenda for change. In this case, change is complex because agriculture is complex. Farmers, consumers, resource agencies, health agencies, local governments and others are involved in the agricultural system. The plan helps provide a focus to guide farmers and the various groups in changes to farming operations and activities and in the development and delivery of policies and programs that impact farming, food processing and sales.
- The Comox Valley has significant potential to expand its agricultural base, related employment and businesses. Expanding the agriculture base in the Comox Valley would contribute positively to the economy, food self sufficiency and potentially to the environment and community. Agricultural development is a viable and desirable economic development option for the Comox Valley.
- To act on or take advantage of the Valley’s agricultural potential, the focus of the Plan is on those issues that can be addressed or that require specific attention from farmers and farm related organizations “close to home”, at the local level.
- Other issues that are Province or Island wide in scope will be referred to commodity organizations, the Farm Community Council, B.C. Agricultural Council, the Island Farmers Alliance or other relevant group with the mandate to address those issues.
- Change is important enough to individual farmers, organizations and agencies that they will be committed to implementation of this Plan.
- The context within which agriculture operates will change over time. This Plan will need to be reviewed for its ongoing relevance after 5 years.

**Figure 4: Beef Cattle Production**



## 7. VISION STATEMENT

If the ideas and changes included in this plan, along with other opportunities and changes such as new markets, new crops and new technology that will emerge over time are acted on, what will that mean for agriculture in the Comox Valley? To capture “where we are headed” with agriculture in the Valley, we have developed the following Vision Statement. It states how agriculture “will be” if the plan, and other changes, are implemented.

***Agriculture in the Comox Valley will be a growing sector of the local economy, with a mix of small, medium and large scale enterprises, focused on regional and local markets. The Valley’s farms will provide a diversity of quality agricultural products. Farmers will be recognized for their wise stewardship of land and water resources and the Valley’s agricultural industry will be recognized for the important role it plays in the community.***

**Figure 5: Potato Production**



## 8. THE AGRICULTURAL PLAN THEMES AND OBJECTIVES

From the information and opinions in Phase 1 of the study, and the review of issues and opportunities in the initial step of Phase 2 of the study, six major areas or “Themes” with related “Objectives” emerged. These Themes and Objectives are:

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▪ <b>Water Management</b>	11
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- Objective 2: To improve drainage infrastructure for agriculture	12
- Objective 3: To improve the environmental resource data base and mapping	13
▪ <b>Land Management</b>	14
- Objective 4: To protect the agricultural land base.	16
- Objective 5: To develop management plans, policies and programs to support agricultural development	17
- Objective 6: To develop planning initiatives to reduce the potential for land use conflict	18
▪ <b>Agricultural / Environmental Stewardship</b>	19
- Objective 7: To develop and support plans and programs for environmental stewardship	20
▪ <b>Agricultural Opportunities</b>	21
- Objective 8: To expand agricultural business opportunities and farm incomes	22
▪ <b>Food Security, Market Development, Safety, Quality and Security</b>	24
- Objective 9: To increase agriculture’s contribution to the economy of the Comox Valley	25
▪ <b>Agricultural Awareness</b>	28
- Objective 10: To improve community support for farmers and local production and to enhance agriculture’s importance in the Region	29

For each of these themes, the Plan proposes goals, objectives or actions and expected outcomes. Lead organizations are identified. A summary of the issues and opportunities identified through the process of the study are included in Appendix B.

In the plan that follows, various acronyms are used for key organizations. Following is a key for those acronyms:

<b>Figure 6: Acronyms</b>			
AAC	Comox Valley Agricultural Advisory Committee	DU	Ducks Unlimited Canada
ADC	Comox Valley Agricultural Development Commission	EDS	Comox Valley Economic Development Society
AgAwC	Comox Valley Agricultural Awareness Committee	FM	Comox Valley Farmers' Market Association
ALR	Agricultural Land Reserve	GIS	Geographic Information System
ALC	B.C. Agricultural Land Commission	HACCP	Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point
BCAC	B.C. Agricultural Council	IFA	Island Farmers Alliance
CA	Comox Valley Chefs Association	LAW	Land and Water BC
CFDCS	Community Futures Comox Strathcona	MAFF	B.C. Ministry of Agriculture Food and Fisheries
CoC	Comox Valley Chamber of Commerce	MoT	Ministry of Transportation
CVEA	Comox Valley Exhibition Association (Fall Fair)	MLA	Montfort Legacy Association
CVFI	Comox Valley Farmers Institute	NIC	North Island College
CVT	Comox Valley Tourism	RDCS	Regional District of Comox-Strathcona
DFO	Fisheries and Oceans Canada	SRM	B.C. Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management

**Figure 7: Farm Sales Outlets**



## A. Water Management

### Context:

The capability of Comox Valley soils is limited by moisture deficiency (60% need irrigation) and excess wetness (25% need drainage), or both (15%). Lack of adequate access to irrigation water in the summer and to adequate drainage in the spring and fall limits opportunities to increase agricultural production. To improve drainage and access to surface water for irrigation, policies and regulations under the federal *Fisheries Act*, the provincial *Fish Protection Act*, as well as regional and local planning policies regarding sensitive systems protection and fisheries habitat must be understood and addressed by farmers and rural residents. A provincial/federal/BCAC “partnership committee” has been established to facilitate stream classification for agriculture, and maintenance applications. Although Vancouver Island has been identified as a key area for committee attention.

Surface water and groundwater resources are also needed for fish and wildlife habitat and other commercial, residential and industrial uses. Agencies stewardship groups and others involved in managing water do not always have a good understanding of farm drainage and irrigation practices or the potential farm drainage and irrigation has to be compatible with other interests and activities such as habitat protection.

Managing water resources in an optimum manner, planning crop types, and managing soils in a manner that minimizes the need for irrigation is an ongoing challenge for farmers.

Inadequate surface water management in urban and settlement areas can result in flooding and reduced water quality in downstream agricultural areas. Management of water courses that flow between two or more municipal jurisdictions requires new initiatives in inter municipal and agency cooperation.

**Figure 8: Farm Irrigation**





<b>Objective 1: To improve access to irrigation water sources for agriculture</b>	
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Desired Outcomes</b>
<p><b>a) Watershed Planning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify the major agricultural watersheds in the Comox Valley (e.g., Black Creek, Tsolum River, Little River etc.)</li> <li>For each of the major agricultural watersheds, develop a watershed management plan, similar to the Black Creek restoration plan, which will involve the community and address the competing demands between agriculture, fishery and other water users for water use, quality, wetlands and habitat.</li> <li>Identify and protect critical recharge areas.</li> <li>Identify and mitigate unused or improperly managed wells.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resolution of many water management issues related to drainage and irrigation</li> <li>Improved cooperation between agencies, farmers and the rural community</li> <li>Improved community awareness</li> <li>Reduced risk of ground water contamination</li> </ul>
<p><b>b) On-Farm Water Storage</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide policy support, technical assistance and incentives to establish water storage (ponds, containment) and distribution systems.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More impoundments and distribution systems for irrigation water</li> </ul>
<p><b>c) Urban "Waste Water"</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review the Regional District Report on the feasibility of reusing wastewater from municipal waste treatment systems, storm water discharge, liquid waste management plans, or other large water using activities in the Valley for the feasibility of use as irrigation water.</li> <li>Implement options appropriate for agriculture.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Beneficial re-use of urban "waste" water for irrigation</li> </ul>
<p><b>d) Ground Water</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review current groundwater inventory and mapping, allocation, and assess potential opportunities for irrigation from aquifer sources.</li> <li>Identify groundwater outflow such as springs and artesian wells and assess their potential as sources of water for irrigation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve access to groundwater resources for irrigation</li> </ul>

<b>Objective 2: To improve drainage and irrigation infrastructure for agriculture</b>	
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Desired Outcomes</b>
<p><b>a) Watershed Planning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As part of the watershed management plan, provide options to improve surface drainage and drainage outlets for sub-surface drain tile.</li> <li>As part of the watershed management plan, provide options to improve access to water for irrigation for lands currently being farmed.</li> <li>Use the MAFF Watercourse Classification in Agricultural Areas<sup>3</sup>, and Agricultural Ditch Maintenance Guidelines<sup>4</sup> to help determine drainage priorities and options.</li> <li>Access any available funding sources such as infrastructure programs to support shared storage facilities and water distribution systems among individual farms.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved surface water drainage systems and drain tile outlets</li> <li>Greater access to surface water resources for agricultural irrigation</li> </ul>
<p><b>b) Storm Water Management</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For watercourses and for proposed development areas that drain into agricultural areas, establish sub watershed management areas, inter municipal committees and processes to address water management issues and agricultural impacts.</li> <li>Develop mitigation plans for current development and drainage areas that cause flooding on agricultural lands.</li> <li>While considering the water flow needs for fisheries habitat, and where it would be an advantage to agriculture, require new development to provide water storage for irrigation using density bonusing or other opportunities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduced the impact of urban and settlement area drainage on agricultural areas</li> <li>Improved access to water for irrigation</li> </ul>
<b>Objective 3: To improve the environmental resource data base and mapping</b>	
<p><b>a) Watershed Planning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As part of the watershed planning process (above), continue to update related information in the Sensitive Habitat Atlas and the related GIS files used by the Regional District and provincial and federal agencies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved accuracy of information in the Sensitive Habitat Atlas and related GIS mapping for planning.</li> <li>Reduce conflicts over resource use and management.</li> </ul>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.agf.gov.bc.ca/resmgmt/publist/800series/810200-1.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.agf.gov.bc.ca/resmgmt/ditchpol/guide/AgWatercourseMaintenance.pdf>

## **B. Land Management**

### **Context:**

Agricultural land is "protected" from non-agricultural development by both the ALR and local policies. Both local government and the Agricultural Land Reserve Commission have important roles in dealing with agricultural land management issues in the Plan area. For this reason ensuring a consistent land use vision and policy framework will assist the protection of the agricultural land resource and the development of the agricultural industry in the Comox Valley.

Under new policies and processes proposed by the Land Commission, there may be opportunities to delegate some of the decisions currently made by the Commission to local government if there are strong local policies for agricultural areas. Having delegated decision making may help to reduce new conflict situations.

Intensive agricultural enterprises such as greenhouses and mushroom farms are not a major feature of agriculture in the Comox Valley. There may be an opportunity for these types of enterprises, but they need to be located and managed in a way that avoids conflicts with adjacent uses. Other types of agricultural uses such as agro-forestry also need to be recognized in local planning policies. The Comox Valley has a healthy tourism industry and there is an opportunity to expand the agri-tourism component of local tourism.

Large scale composting is primarily a commercial activity related to composting of non-farm wastes. Farmers compost manure and occasionally use commercial composting facilities

for disposal livestock mortalities. Appropriate siting, size, technology and operational procedures should be used to minimize the impact of commercial composting operations on urban or rural residential areas.

Greenways through the Comox Valley have been addressed both as a general study and as part of the Rural Comox Valley Official Community Plan. Greenways as natural areas are of less concern to farmers than greenways that support recreational trails. When trails are proposed in a farming area, care in selecting trail locations and establishing mitigation measures to reduce the impact on agriculture are required.

The Comox Valley has a considerable amount of agricultural activity in close proximity to non-farm land uses. This is in the form of urban / agricultural interfaces, non-farm land uses located in the farm areas or farming located near rural residential areas. In B.C., the ALR provides clear urban / farm edges in many areas.

Agricultural Land Reserve Commission policies and guidelines allow for a variety of different approaches to enhance land use compatibility. To explore different buffering options, separation distances, and other land use considerations, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries is working with local governments and farm organizations on a "special management area" initiative. Work to date has largely focused on the urban / agricultural interface that most often (but not always) corresponds to the ALR boundary.



An important feature of the special management area concept is that it bridges the interface by considering land uses and the application of different land management techniques on both sides of the urban / farm boundary. Defining special management areas and the development of a package of associated policies and regulations is based on the importance of efforts to enhance land use compatibility from the standpoint of "shared responsibility". This recognizes that sources of conflict can be generated on the farm (e.g. noise, dust and odours) and from non-farm uses (e.g. trespass, vandalism and flooding).

The Comox Valley also has areas of mixed rural residential and farm use. Within these areas new or expanding farm uses or increases in residential use can increase to the potential for land use conflict. In these areas special attention may be needed to ensure that within the ALR agriculture is protected and conflicts with residential and other non-farm rural land uses are reduced to a minimum. Measures that could be undertaken include limiting the establishment of incompatible non-farm uses and requiring buffering and fencing of non-farm uses to reduce impacts.

Outside the ALR where there will continue to be a mix of farm and residential uses, policies should achieve the highest level of land use compatibility. This might include limitations on the type of agriculture conducted on smaller sites where it could have negative impacts on adjoining non-agricultural land uses and the use of buffering and fencing to reduce such impacts.

B.C. has a Farm Practices Board, part of the mandate of which is to address agricultural conflicts. Local alternatives should be explored to address conflicts before they reach this level.

**Figure 9: Agriculture and Urban Development**



Objective 4: To protect the agricultural land base	
Actions	Desired Outcomes
<p><b>a) Regional and Local Area Planning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Review and revise policies in the Rural Comox Valley OCP to:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support no net loss of land from the ALR.</li> <li>- Maintain and enhance policies that direct rural settlement to designated settlement areas.</li> <li>- Restrict subdivision and housing development on agriculture lands.</li> <li>- Keep ALR lands in the RDCS in boundary expansions.</li> <li>- Retain current large agricultural parcels.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Retain the ALR land base</li> </ul>
<p><b>b) ALR Management</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Monitor Agricultural Land Reserve Commission/ALR policy changes and develop strategies to respond to proposed changes.</li> <li>▪ To ensure a consistent policy framework, the Regional Board and Land Reserve Commission should take steps to ensure strong lines of communication and consultation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ More local decision-making about rural land and resource use</li> <li>▪ Improved communication between RDCS and the Land Reserve Commission.</li> </ul>

## Objective 5: To develop management plans, policies and programs to support agricultural development

Actions	Desired Outcomes
<p><b>a) <i>Regional and Local Area Planning</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Work with MAFF and adjoining municipalities to define special management areas along urban / agricultural interfaces for the application of policy initiatives designed to enhance land use compatibility.</li> <li>▪ Review and revise policies in the Rural Comox Valley OCP and Zoning Bylaw to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Designate special management areas and develop farm and "urban edge" policies and best management plans and consider the use of development permits for the protection of farming.</li> <li>- Mitigate impacts of greenway development on agriculture,</li> <li>- Use zoning as a tool to reduce conflict,</li> <li>- Develop policy regarding agricultural land committed to conservation,</li> <li>- Develop strategies to enhance on-farm income generation opportunities such as agri-tourism,</li> <li>- Develop policies to support composting, greenhouses, mushroom farms and agro-forestry.</li> <li>- Develop policies to address farm/non-farm conflicts in the ALR.</li> <li>- Identify high risk groundwater areas and develop agricultural policies and standards that will mitigate or avoid those impacts.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Work with adjacent municipalities to encourage the efficient use of existing serviced urban, and future urban lands outside the ALR.</li> <li>▪ Advocate for inclusion of farm related private woodlot and agro forestry as an agricultural land use for policy and land taxation purposes with the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, the Provincial Agricultural Land Commission, the BC Assessment Authority and the Union of BC Municipalities.</li> <li>▪ Develop policies for farming areas outside the ALR that support a mix of appropriate small farm and rural residential uses, developed in a manner that reduces the potential for land use conflict.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reduced farm/non-farm conflicts</li> <li>▪ Improved policies and management of the "urban edge" both on farms and in the urban area</li> <li>▪ Improved income generation and business opportunities in the rural area</li> <li>▪ Improved environmental protection in rural areas</li> <li>▪ Improved opportunities for farm related private woodlot and agro forestry</li> </ul>

## Objective 6: To develop planning initiatives to reduce the potential for land use conflict

Actions	Desired Outcomes
<p><b>a) Conflict Resolution</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish conflict resolution mechanisms to mediate and resolve issues before they escalate to a provincial level adjudication or the courts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A local mediator, or panel that can be called upon to address local farm/non-farm conflicts when they arise</li> </ul>
<p><b>b) Farmer Education/Awareness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve farmer outreach programs to increase farmer's awareness of non-farm neighbours and approaches to minimize conflict.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved awareness of nuisance issues and improved farm management for reducing sources of nuisance and conflict with non-farmers</li> </ul>
<p><b>c) Rural and Urban Resident Education and Awareness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Through public education with rural residents, real estate agencies and organizations, and community associations, reduce trespass, litter and other impacts of non-farm rural residents and rural land users on farms.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved awareness of sources of nuisance impacting farms and reduction of nuisance and conflict with farmers</li> </ul>

## **C. Agricultural/Environmental Stewardship**

### **Context:**

The long-term health of farms depends in part on good quality soil, water, and air. In order to preserve these resources, good management needs to include protection of the environment. An effective way to protect these resources is through good environmental planning. Wise management and stewardship of air, soil and water resources are necessary to protect the quality and quantity of natural resources.

The B.C. Agricultural Council, with the support of BC MAFF is currently supporting the development of Environmental Farm Plans (EFP's). In other areas, such as Ontario, EFP's have helped farmers improve management in several ways. The process of developing EFP's ensures that the farmer is aware of and has taken action to avoid problems that could cause damage to the environment. An EFP is also an indication to the consumer that the farmer knows and cares about the environment that (s)he works in. The overriding goal, however, is to ensure the health of the soil, air and water that sustain life.

The Comox Valley is considered to be a very high priority habitat area for several different fish and wildlife species. The Valley is a critical wintering area for Trumpeter Swans and other migratory birds. The Valley's watersheds are also highly valued for fish habitat. It is clear that the community wants to ensure that farms, fish and wildlife coexist in a positive manner and remain a part of the Comox Valley. Agriculture should not be unreasonably compromised in measures that are taken to protect fish and wildlife. This, of necessity, requires that environmental interests work closely

with landowners, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries and the Provincial Agricultural Land Commission to find solutions that are acceptable to all parties. The challenge is to create effective environmental protection solutions while ensuring that the rights of the landowner are recognized and that if appropriate, compensation for reduced agricultural productivity is provided.

**Figure 10: Drainage and Agriculture**



## Objective 7: To develop and support plans and programs for environmental stewardship

Actions	Desired Outcomes
<p><b>a) <i>Environmental Farm Plans</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Initiate a pilot project to develop an Environmental Farm Plan (EFP)<sup>5</sup> on a “demonstration” farm in the Comox Valley.</li> <li>▪ Host field days at the pilot farm to demonstrate the improvements that resulted from the plan and encourage others to develop EFP’s.</li> <li>▪ Promote those farms that participate to build consumer awareness of the stewardship efforts by farmers.</li> <li>▪ Review current enhancement projects and initiate an EFP program for all farms to enhance habitat in a manner that also improves farm productivity.</li> <li>▪ Encourage land stewardship practices that lead to enhanced habitat and riparian area management.</li> <li>▪ Provide policy support, technical assistance and incentives to maintain and enhance areas of environmental importance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improved surface and groundwater quality</li> <li>▪ Improved awareness of environmental issues by farmers</li> <li>▪ Improved consumer awareness of the stewardship efforts by farmers</li> <li>▪ Reduced potential risk of water contamination</li> <li>▪ Increased habitat for wildlife and fish populations</li> <li>▪ Improved protection of watersheds</li> <li>▪ Improved groundwater recharge capacity</li> </ul>
<p><b>b) <i>Promote adequate compensation for landowners that set aside land for environmental purposes</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Advocate for property tax relief, funds for conservation easements, or other mechanisms to reduce the direct cost of environmental enhancement to farmers.</li> <li>▪ Where the integrity of the buffer can be maintained, include selective harvest of farm related, private woodlot and agro forestry products as a permitted use in areas that are set aside as buffers to protect streams, water bodies, wetlands and sensitive areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improved fish and wildlife habitat protection</li> <li>▪ Reduced costs of environmental protection to farmers</li> <li>▪ Farm income generation from buffers</li> </ul>

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix C for information on Environmental Farm Plans



## **D. Agricultural Opportunities**

### **Context:**

The Comox Valley has the potential to generate a much higher level of agricultural production. Less than half of the agricultural land base is being actively farmed and with drainage and irrigation improvements, the productivity of some of that land could be greatly increased.

The potential local/regional demand for agricultural product also appears to be more than is current produced. It is estimated that less than 10% of the net value of the food consumed on Vancouver Island is produced on the Island. The climate and soils will support increased local production of foods, and the growing population is demanding fresh, local product. The Comox Valley Farmers' Market is a good example of this increase in demand, having grown from 6 vendors to approximately 60 in just 10 years. There are also opportunities for greenhouses, mushroom farms, berries and agro-forestry and other production activities such as land based aquaculture that should be expanded and supported.

There are several limitations preventing the industry from growing. Some individuals with the desire to farm do not have the land or capital to do so. Availability of labour is concern. Others are not aware of the opportunities or how to get started. In many cases, the resources needed are available but many farmers are either not aware of them or how to find them – access to information is standing in the way of opportunity.

Easy access to good information with local knowledge would help capitalize on economic opportunities.

Profitability is another limitation on local production. The commodity based farms that are the mainstay of the local industry (dairy, cranberries) are generally dealing with variable prices (adjusted for inflation) for their products and rising cost of production. The cost of bringing some inputs, like feed, fertilizer and energy onto the island can make it very difficult to compete with "off-Island" producers. Reducing cost of production is critical to the viability of many of these enterprises.

Lack of infrastructure is a limiting factor to some farms and to the development of new ventures. The recent closure of agricultural research activities at the Oyster River Research Farm has limited opportunities for development of improved management practices and information for the Island's farmers.

**Figure 11: Oyster River Research Farm**



## Objective 8: To expand agricultural business opportunities and farm incomes

Actions	Desired Outcomes
<p><b>a) <i>Establish an Agricultural Development Commission (ADC) as a sub-group of EDS to promote agricultural opportunities</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish an Agricultural Development Commission, as a subcommittee of the Economic Development Society, whose mandate would be to explore and develop economic activities related to agriculture and to investigate opportunities to increase profitability.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved linkage between EDS and agricultural and rural business and other sectors such as tourism and forestry</li> <li>Forum for discussion, debate and development of new business concepts</li> <li>Access to business planning and development resources for prospective agribusiness people</li> <li>Higher levels of local production and improved profitability</li> </ul>
<p><b>b) <i>Improve access to and awareness of information</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish a portable information centre to provide information to consumers about local production and to prospective farmers about agricultural opportunities, soils, etc. It could be a centre for job postings.</li> <li>Establish a "referral" web site with links to important sources of agricultural information such as B.C. Stats, Island Farmers Alliance, B.C. MAFF.</li> <li>Improve farmer and consumer awareness of the benefits of organic biosolid recycling on agricultural land.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved access and exchange of information</li> <li>Improved consumer education</li> <li>Training of 'ambassadors' for local agriculture.</li> <li>Improved access to information on issues such as farm labour, land lease availability, regulatory changes for farmers and prospective workers</li> <li>Increased understanding of benefits of use of organic biosolids in agricultural production</li> </ul>
<p><b>c) <i>Reduce input costs</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Include reducing input costs in the mandate of the Agricultural Development Commission</li> <li>Encourage farmers to use environmental programs and the Scientific Research and Experimental Development Program to develop beneficial re-use of waste products.</li> <li>Encourage farmers to use provincial and/or federal infrastructure programs to develop shared facilities and infrastructure (e.g., water storage, distribution.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased and improved beneficial re-use of waste products and cleaner environment</li> <li>Reduced costs of waste disposal</li> <li>Lower input costs</li> <li>Increased availability of urban storm water for irrigation</li> </ul>



Actions	Desired Outcomes
<p><b>d) Support Infrastructure Development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Review and support opportunities for appropriate additional infrastructure that will enhance rural and agricultural opportunities.</li> <li>▪ Support existing agriculturally related infrastructure (processing, services, distribution, wholesale, retail)</li> <li>▪ Ensure that policy and zoning is in place that will allow appropriate infrastructure to develop.</li> <li>▪ Support infrastructure development such as an Airport Terminal and storage and barge facility that are economically viable and that will improve the overall economy.</li> <li>▪ Support development of covered shelter or enclosed facility for the farmers market</li> <li>▪ Encourage RDCA to retain the ownership and management of the exhibition grounds over the long term and support the use and management of the grounds for the long term benefit of the agricultural industry and the Comox Valley.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Protection of the infrastructure that supports large farms</li> <li>▪ Trickle down effect on smaller farms created by maintaining the critical mass of agribusiness needed for a viable industry</li> <li>▪ Viable infrastructure that supports and strengthens the local agricultural sector</li> <li>▪ Improved opportunities for full year local sales</li> </ul>
<p><b>e) Retain the Oyster River Research Farm</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Promote and support the continued operation of Oyster River Research Farm, first, as an operating farm and, second, as a research centre and model for improving local agriculture.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Oyster River Research Farm will continue to be a vital component of Comox Valley Agriculture</li> </ul>
<p><b>f) Market Responsive Marketing Boards and Geographic Equity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Support farm groups in their efforts to achieve equitable distribution of production quota to Vancouver Island so the Comox Valley can produce a larger portion of the food consumed locally and regionally.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increased food self sufficiency</li> <li>▪ Increased opportunity for production</li> <li>▪ Potential to expand certain sectors locally, such as greenhouse production</li> </ul>

## ***E. Food Security, Market Development, Safety, and Quality***

### **Context:**

Many people (producers and consumers) have expressed the goal of producing a larger portion of our own food on Vancouver Island. It is estimated that less than 10% of the net value of the food consumed on Vancouver Island is produced on the Island, and there is no reason to believe that the ratios are significantly different in the Comox Valley. This has implications for food security, which is our ability to feed ourselves without depending on significant volumes of imported food. The Region is dependent on transportation from the Mainland and on imports from other jurisdictions for its food supply. At the same time, there appears to be a significant opportunity for a greater contribution to the region's economy from locally produced agriculture and food products.

One challenge is for regional producers to access centralized distribution systems operated by the major food retailers and wholesalers. This is even more problematic for small farmers who may not have the volumes or resources to supply these larger customers. Even when farmers are successful in obtaining listings, the bulk of the consumer price (estimated at up to 80%) goes to the distribution channels, rather than staying with the producers in the community.

Along with the Valley's strong Farmers' Market, there may be potential to expand direct sales to local consumers. Also, there is no localized marketing infrastructure to help producers to market through indirect channels such as retailers, wholesalers or processors. Island Farmers Alliance is

undertaking Island wide initiatives in this regard.

There appear to be opportunities to improve revenues and returns in the agriculture sector in the Comox Valley, through a co-ordinated approach to the identification of new product opportunities, added value marketing, processing and agri-tourism. One competitive advantage of local marketing is that Valley farmers can offer freshness, higher quality and, possibly, improved food safety compared to imported products. Farmers' Market vendors report that consumers are re-assured by being able to deal directly with the people who have produced the food and who, by implication, are taking direct responsibility for it.

**Figure 12: Comox Valley Farmers' Market**



Objective 9: To increase agriculture's contribution to the economy of the Comox Valley	
Actions	Desired Outcomes
<p><b>a) Mandate the Agricultural Development Commission to expand market opportunities.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Include in Commission responsibilities to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Confirm current level of food self-sufficiency in the Comox Valley,</li> <li>- Clarify "local" market (Valley or Island-wide) opportunities,</li> <li>- Set up regional market intelligence capability and information exchange (See Agriculture Centre – Objective 8,)</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Evaluate and co-ordinate market development opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improved focus and effectiveness of local agriculture and food marketing</li> <li>▪ Better and faster flow of information to producers</li> <li>▪ Enhanced status and consideration of importance of agriculture in regional economic and planning strategies</li> </ul>
<p><b>b) Market Research</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Initiate local market research project to identify: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Current consumer perceptions,</li> <li>- Potential competitive advantages (e.g., organic, quality, freshness)</li> <li>- Potential market gaps</li> <li>- Potential new product niches and opportunities</li> <li>- Potential for expansion of alternative marketing channels (Farmers' Market, Direct sales, etc.)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop an objective basis for business development decisions</li> </ul>
<p><b>c) Improve local marketing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Promote local agriculture products, including a possible Regional Marketing Campaign.</li> <li>▪ Develop regional marketing strategy for new products.</li> <li>▪ Improve "product recognition" of local products (vs. commodity sales).</li> <li>▪ Promote "trust" in local farmers and farm products.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increased local demand and local market share</li> <li>▪ Improved viability and sustainability of farming operations</li> <li>▪ Improved local food security</li> </ul>

Actions	Desired Outcomes
<p><b>d) Centre for Innovation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Investigate how to establish a Comox Valley Centre for Innovation in food and agriculture, ideally at the Oyster River Research Farm to provide research and development services for:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improved Production techniques,</li> <li>- Small scale production,</li> <li>- New products and small scale processing</li> <li>- Laboratory services,</li> <li>- Marketing innovations.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Consider re-structuring Oyster River Research Facility to permit these uses.</li> <li>▪ Ensure plan policies and zoning permits these uses at the Oyster River Research Farm.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Development of a leading edge facility to support the agri-food industry for:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Comox Valley region</li> <li>- Vancouver Island</li> <li>- British Columbia</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>e) Associations/linkages</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop linkages to other business groups, such as Chamber of Commerce, Rotary clubs, retailers, financial institutions, restaurants, wholesalers, processors, tourism operators to create a comprehensive regional food and agriculture strategy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Integration of Agriculture in regional economic development strategies</li> <li>▪ Expansion of the local concept of agriculture, and support activities to increase the emphasis on “food”</li> </ul>
<p><b>f) Multi-commodity marketing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Support and improve linkages to Vancouver Island Produce and other brokerage firms and initiatives to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Co-ordinate production and on-stream timing,</li> <li>- Provide a central order desk for local retailers,</li> <li>- Provide information about sources of supply and on-farm markets,</li> <li>- Co-ordinate transportation of inputs and goods for sale.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increased sales and profitability for the Region’s agriculture sector</li> </ul>

Actions	Desired Outcomes
<p><b><i>g) Regulation</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that on-farm opportunities are recognized in ALR policies and regulations and in local zoning bylaws: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- For value added processing of agricultural products,</li> <li>- For marketing of agricultural products.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Include individual and joint farm processing and marketing uses as a permitted use on farms and on individual lots in the agricultural area.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulatory environment supporting innovation and economic development</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>h) Skills development</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop training programmes related to new market development initiatives and changes in the agriculture and food industry such as marketing, customer service and sales, employee management, "Super host."</li> <li>• Develop training initiatives for both seasonal and part time farm, labour.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Farm management equipped to take advantage of economic development opportunities.</li> <li>• Farm employees with adequate skills.</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>i) Food safety</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a farmer awareness campaign related to food safety.</li> <li>• Offer Foodsafe registration and information at Fall Fair.</li> <li>• Prepare media articles.</li> <li>• Develop an education programme for schools.</li> <li>• Encourage the Farmers' Market Association to require that a Foodsafe course be taken by all food vendors.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consumer and producer confidence that Comox Valley food is safe</li> <li>• Proactive avoidance of food safety issues</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>j) Food Processing</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Devise and support strategies to support small scale local processing.</li> <li>• Support initiatives to provide shared laboratory and processing facilities and equipment such as a community kitchen.</li> <li>• Encourage Research and Development related to processing (see Centre for Innovation.)</li> <li>• Provide Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) training and facilities to local producers/processors.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small scale local processors enabled to bring their products to market within food safety regulations</li> <li>• Vibrant local processing sector, including targeted and profitable new products</li> </ul>

## **F. Agricultural Awareness**

### **Context:**

Pressures for change on the agricultural sector are significant and ongoing. There is a need for continuing public education and political advocacy on the issues affecting agriculture and the impacts of related political decisions.

Maintaining local community awareness and appreciation of the values of the local agricultural sector in terms of food quality, economic importance, ecological contribution, and its role in sustaining a "countryside" in the Valley is crucial to the long term success of agriculture in the Valley.

At present, consumers and tourists are not adequately informed about on-farm sales and agricultural tourism opportunities. A higher degree of public awareness will enable agriculture to play a more significant role in regional economic development, and facilitate resolution of planning and resource conflicts. Improved public awareness and closer connections between the agriculture sector and the consuming public will also lead to greater local market share for local producers.

**Figure 13: Farm Tours**



**Objective 10: To improve community support for farmers and local production and to enhance agriculture's importance in the Region**

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Desired Outcomes</b>
<p><b>a) <i>Agricultural Awareness Committee</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Re-focus and re-energize the Agricultural Awareness committee.</li> <li>Involve retailers, processors and educational institutions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More focus and co-ordination for agricultural awareness activities</li> </ul>
<p><b>b) <i>Public relations campaign</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On-going public relations campaign, such as weekly farm news in local media.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased public awareness of agricultural issues</li> </ul>
<p><b>c) <i>Agriculture in the Classroom</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure full support of the agricultural community.</li> <li>Identify resources such as farms for farm tours, contacts and speakers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The youth of the Valley informed about agriculture.</li> </ul>
<p><b>d) <i>"Food for Thought" workshops</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rejuvenate the "Food for Thought" workshops and bus tours. Consider fee-based tours, with revenue supporting agricultural awareness programmes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased public awareness and interaction with the farming community.</li> </ul>
<p><b>e) <i>RDCS Agricultural Advisory Committee</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain the Agricultural Advisory Committee to the Regional District of Comox-Strathcona.</li> <li>Consider broadening the role to address general agricultural issues.</li> <li>Support opportunities for education, training and information exchange with other AAC's.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved understanding of agricultural issues within the Regional District.</li> <li>Greater consideration of agricultural concerns and needs in regional policy decisions</li> </ul>



Actions	Desired Outcomes
<p><b>f) Fall Fair</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Support and promote the Fall Fair.</li> <li>▪ Reduce infrastructure costs to the Fall Fair.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increased participation in the Fall Fair and improved public awareness and interaction with the farming community.</li> </ul>
<p><b>g) Farmers' Market</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increase public awareness of the Farmers' Market Support expansion of the size and hours of operation of the Farmers' Market.</li> <li>▪ Conduct market research to assess demand, product mix and optimum location.</li> <li>▪ Promote the Farmers' Market as a tourism destination.</li> <li>▪ Expand and promote existing "Tour of Vendors Farms" programme.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increased sales (prices) of local agriculture and food products</li> <li>▪ Enhanced profile for Farmers' Market</li> <li>▪ Increased public awareness and interaction with the farming community.</li> <li>▪ Increased consumer awareness of direct farm purchase opportunities</li> <li>▪ Enhanced profile of agriculture among Valley residents and tourists.</li> </ul>
<p><b>h) Signage</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ensure provincial and regional signage regulations do not limit appropriate agricultural signage opportunities.</li> <li>▪ Improve and expand signage to locations of on-farm sales and agricultural tourism locations.</li> <li>▪ Establish a local signage standard compatible with MoT standards.</li> <li>▪ Search for or develop programs to fund agriculture and food signage in the Valley.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increased consumer awareness of direct farm purchase opportunities</li> <li>▪ Enhanced profile of agriculture among Valley residents and tourists.</li> </ul>



Actions	Desired Outcomes
<p><b><i>i) Agri-tourism</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop an inventory of current and potential agri-tourism and rural experiences.</li> <li>▪ Link to existing Farm Stay tourism and working holiday programmes.</li> <li>▪ Establish Comox Valley as a culinary tourism destination using local farm products.</li> <li>▪ Investigate need for revised local government regulations for farm B &amp; B's based on new ALR regulations.</li> <li>▪ Develop Valley-wide activities and events that attract tourists to the area, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Comox Valley Heritage – mining and farming in 1900,</li> <li>- Agricultural tour routes,</li> <li>- Arts and agriculture Festival.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Develop marketing materials for local agri-tourism opportunities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increased year-round tourism opportunities to complement winter sports</li> <li>▪ Longer stays and greater spending by tourists who visit the region</li> <li>▪ “Free” labour for small farmers</li> <li>▪ Increased sales (prices) of Comox Valley agriculture and food products</li> <li>▪ Increased income from agri-tourism</li> </ul>

## 9. PLAN IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

Change happens because people and organizations decide to change. A plan is a vehicle to help focus decisions for change. In this Plan, the proposed actions and objectives will happen as the result of initiatives taken by various organizations involved with agriculture in the Comox Valley. In this section, the goals, objectives and actions are organized by the lead group or agency, and the other organizational partners that should be involved in the proposed activity. The proposed roles and responsibilities can then be addressed by the respective organizations as part of their organizational planning processes. Indicators or measures to determine if progress has been made are also shown.

**Figure 14: Monitoring Objectives**

<b>Figure 14: Monitoring Objectives</b>	
<b>A. Water Management</b>	<b>Indicators (Source)</b>
Objective 1: To improve access to irrigation water sources for agriculture.	Increase in the area under irrigation (Stats Canada)
Objective 2: To improve drainage infrastructure for agriculture.	Number of approved drainage improvement applications (DFO)
Objective 3: To improve the environmental resource data base and mapping.	Updated Habitat Atlas and GIS Mapping (RDCS)
<b>B. Land Management</b>	
Objective 4: To protect the agricultural land base.	ALR land retained for agriculture. Improved communication between RDCS, ALC
Objective 5: To develop management plans, policies, and programs to support agricultural development.	Established urban edge and other special management areas. Revised OCP policies (RDCS)
Objective 6: To develop planning initiatives to reduce the potential for land use conflict.	Mediation process established, improved awareness of agriculture (RDCS)

<b>C. Agricultural/Environmental Stewardship</b>	<b>Indicators (Source)</b>
Objective 7: To develop and support plans and programs for environmental stewardship.	Number of Environmental Farm Plans, Training events (BCAC, MAFF)
<b>D. Agricultural Opportunities</b>	
Objective 8: To expand agricultural business opportunities and farm incomes.	Increase in the number, net incomes of farms (Census Canada)
<b>E. Food Security, Market Development, Safety, and Quality</b>	
Objective 9: To increase local food supply and agriculture's contribution to the economy of the Comox Valley by improving marketing and distribution infrastructure.	Increase in the number of farms, employees, and value of net farm sales (Stats Canada). Increase in market share of local products
<b>F. Agriculture Awareness</b>	
Objective 10: To improve community support for farmers and local production, and to enhance agriculture's importance in the Region by improving understanding and acceptance of farming practices.	Reduced number of complaints and conflicts (MAFF, ALC) Increased Agricultural Awareness (MAFF, AgAwC)

**Figure 15: Monitoring Actions**

<b>A. Water Management</b>						
<b>Objective 1: To improve access to irrigation water sources for agriculture</b>						
<b>Action</b>	<b>Lead Agency</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Timing</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>Feasibility</b>
<b>a) Watershed planning</b>	<b>RDCS</b>	DFO, SRM, BC Hydro	Number of plans completed, implemented	Over 5 years	High	Funding, interagency cooperation is needed
<b>b) On-Farm Water Storage</b>	<b>MAFF</b>	CVFI, DFO, RDCS	Number of new water storages	Over 5 years	High	Cost, agency and farmer collaboration are limiting factors
<b>c) Urban "Waste" Water</b>	<b>RDCS</b>	Municipalities, developers, agencies, MoT	Number of plans completed, implemented	As needed	High	Focus on new development areas. Funding, interagency cooperation is needed
<b>d) Ground Water</b>	<b>RDCS</b>	SRM, CVFI, MAFF, LAW	Review complete, actions proposed	Over 5 years	Medium	Cost and agency collaboration are limiting factors
<b>Objective 2: To improve drainage infrastructure for agriculture</b>						
<b>a) Watershed planning</b>	<b>RDCS</b>	DFO, SRM, BC Hydro	Number of plans completed, implemented	Over 5 years	High	Funding, interagency cooperation is needed
<b>b) Urban Storm Water</b>	<b>RDCS</b>	Municipalities, developers, agencies, MoT	Number of plans completed, implemented	Ongoing	High	Funding, interagency cooperation is needed
<b>Objective 3: To improve the environmental resource data base and mapping</b>						
<b>a) Watershed planning</b>	<b>RDCS</b>	DFO, BC Hydro, , SRM, Stewardship Groups	Number of plans completed, revisions to data base	Over 5 years	High	Funding, interagency cooperation is needed

<b>B. Land Management</b>						
<b>Objective 4: To protect the agricultural land base</b>						
<b>Action</b>	<b>Lead Agency</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Timing</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>Feasibility</b>
<b>a) Regional and Local Area Planning</b>	<b>RDCS</b>	ALC, AAC, MAFF, CVFI	Revised plans	Over 5 years	High	Can be included as part of ongoing plan review
<b>b) ALR Management</b>	<b>RDCS</b>	ALC, AAC	ALR land retained, improved communication, revised RDCS policies and procedures	Ongoing	High	Timing – RDCS policies will be developed in response to revised ALR and Commission policies and procedures
<b>Objective 5: To develop management plans, policies and programs to support agricultural development</b>						
<b>a) Regional, Local Area Planning</b>	<b>RDCS</b>	ALC, AAC, MAFF, CVFI	Revised policies, reduced conflicts, increased opportunities	Over 5 years	High	Can be included as part of ongoing plan review
<b>Objective 6: To develop planning initiatives to reduce the potential for land use conflict</b>						
<b>a) Conflict Resolution</b>	<b>MAFF/ RDCS</b>	IFA, CVFI	Mediation established	1 year	Medium	Cost is limiting factor
<b>b) Farmer Education</b>	<b>MAFF</b>	RDCS, CVFI, IFA	Workshops conducted, materials circulated	2 years	Medium	Staff resources and educational materials needed.
<b>c) Rural, Urban Resident Education</b>	<b>MAFF</b>	RDCS, CVFI, IFA	Workshops conducted, materials circulated	2 years	Medium	Staff resources and educational materials needed

<b>C. Agricultural/Environmental Stewardship</b>						
<b>Objective 7: to develop and support plans and programs for environmental stewardship</b>						
<b>Action</b>	<b>Lead Agency</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Timing</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>Feasibility</b>
<b>a) Environmental Farm Plans</b>	<b>BCAC</b>	IFA, CVFI, RDCS, MAFF, DFO	Workshops, Farm Plans completed, BMP material produced, practices adopted.	Over 5 years	Medium	Needs funding and farmer participation. DU has some funding in place. Process needs to be developed and interagency cooperation is needed.
<b>b) Landowner Compensation</b>	<b>BCAC</b>	DU, BC Assessment, MAFF, IFA, Farm Community Council, Agriculture Canada	Programs in place. Conservation easements in place	Over 5 years	Medium	Limited by funding

<b>D. Agricultural Opportunities</b>						
<b>Objective 8: To expand agricultural business opportunities and farm incomes</b>						
<b>Action</b>	<b>Lead Agency</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Timing</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>Feasibility</b>
<b>a) Agricultural Development Commission</b>	<b>EDS</b>	MAFF, IFA, CVFI, RDCS	Commission established, active	Over 2 years	High	Needs EDS support. Potentially limited time and resources needed to initiate
<b>b) Improve Access to Information</b>	<b>EDS</b>	FM, MAFF, CVFI, RDCS	New web site, information access in place	1 year	High	Requires start up funding.
<b>c) Reduce input costs</b>	<b>ADC</b>	RDCS, MAFF, IFA, CVFI	Increased use of organic biosolids	2 years	Medium	Partially dependant on the establishment of an Ag Development Commission.
<b>d) Support Infrastructure Development</b>	<b>EDS</b>	CVFI, IFA, RDCS	Infrastructure developed	5 years	Medium	Ongoing. Formation of an economic driver such as the ADC noted above would enhance the process.
<b>e) Oyster River Research Farm</b>	<b>MLA, EDS</b>	RDCS, CVFI, IFA, MAFF, UBC	Maintained as farm, innovation centre	2 years	High	Depends on willingness of UBC to partner, and funding.
<b>f) Market Responsive Marketing Boards</b>	<b>IFA</b>	EDS, CVFI	Increased quota allocation to Vancouver Island	5 years	Low	This is a provincial issue that is being dealt with by the IFA. The IFA will need support to make it happen.

<b>E. Food Security, Market Development, Safety, and Quality</b>						
<b>Objective 9: To increase agriculture's contribution to the economy of the Comox Valley</b>						
<b>Action</b>	<b>Lead Agency</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Timing</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>Feasibility</b>
<b>a) Expand Market Opportunities.</b>	<b>ADC</b>	EDS, FI, FM, MAFF	Increased production and sales	Over next 5 years	Medium	Requires ADC to be established, cooperation between organizations and resources.
<b>b) Market Research</b>	<b>ADC</b>	EDS, CVFI, FM	Study completed, implemented	Next year	Medium	Requires funding
<b>c) Improve local marketing</b>	<b>FM, Direct Farm Sales Assn.</b>	Retailers, Organic Producers Assn's,	Increased local demand, market share	Over 5 years	Medium /Low	Current demand exceeds local production
<b>d) Centre for Innovation</b>	<b>MLA</b>	EDS, ADC, CFDCS, CVFI, RDCS, MAFF	Centre established, active	Over 5 years	Medium	Vision, cost and agency collaboration are limiting factors
<b>e) Linkages</b>	<b>ADC</b>	EDS, CFDCS, CoC, AgAwC, MAFF, CVFI, CA	Inter organization events, meetings, communication	Over next 3 years	Medium	Does not require significant resources. Challenge will be in ensuring relevance to other business groups
<b>f) Multi-commodity marketing</b>	<b>ADC</b>	CVFI, FM, IFA, EDS, CFDCS	Brokerage or other approach established	Over next 3 years	Medium	Requires co-operation between producers and some initial investment
<b>g) Regulation</b>	<b>RDCS</b>	AAC, ALC, MAFF	Revised Plans, Zoning Bylaws	Immediate	Medium	Inter agency cooperation required



Action	Lead Agency	Partners	Indicator	Timing	Priority	Feasibility
<b><i>h) Skills Development</i></b>	<b>MAFF, CVFI</b>	IFA, NIC, FM, Malaspina,	Producer participation in training	Over next 5 years	Medium	Should be based on producer needs
<b><i>i) Food Safety</i></b>	<b>IFA</b>	CVFI, AgAwC, MAFF, RDCS, Vancouver Island Health Authority	Publications, material, media coverage	Ongoing	High	Cost, co-ordination and time are limiting factors
<b><i>j) Food Processing</i></b>	<b>CVFI</b>	FM, Vancouver Island Health Authority	Increased local processing, quality control	Over next 5 years	Low	There is little support in the agriculture community for federal meat inspection. Focus on education.

<b>F. Agriculture Awareness</b>						
<b>Objective 10: To improve community support for farmers and local production, and to enhance agriculture's importance in the Region by improving understanding and acceptance of farming practices</b>						
<b>Action</b>	<b>Lead Agency</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Timing</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>Feasibility</b>
<b>a) Agricultural Awareness Committee</b>	<b>CVFI</b>	MAFF, RDCS, FM, AgAwC	Ag Awareness Committee is active	Immediate	High	Limited by volunteer resources
<b>b) Public Relations</b>	<b>AgAwC</b>	MAFF, CVFI, FM	Media articles, interviews, materials	ongoing	Medium	Limited by funding, Committee Resources
<b>c) Ag in the Classroom</b>	<b>AgAwC</b>	MAFF, BC Ag in the Classroom, S.D. #71	Increase in participation	Over 5 years	Medium	Program already in existence
<b>d) "Food for Thought"</b>	<b>AgAwC</b>	MAFF, CVFI, IFA, ADC	Program active	Over 5 years	Medium	Requires additional skills and resources
<b>e) Ag Advisory Committee</b>	<b>CVFI</b>	RDCS, MAFF, FM, IFA	Updated mandate for the AAC	1 year	Medium	May be related to changes in ALR policies, management, conflict resolution.
<b>f) Fall Fair</b>	<b>CVEA</b>	RDCS, FM, CVFI	Increased attendance, reduced costs	Immediate	High	Expansion of existing initiative
<b>g) Farmers' Market</b>	<b>FM</b>	CVT, ADC, CVFI, RDCS, municipalities	Increased hours, vendors, customers	Over 5 years	High	Farmers' Market successful and leading a number of awareness initiatives
<b>h) Signage</b>	<b>ADC</b>	RDCS, CVFI, MoT, CVT, FM	Signs and program in place	Over 3 years	Medium	No major resources required, but will need to cooperation.
<b>i) Agri-tourism</b>	<b>CVT</b>	CoC, MAFF, IFA, CVFI, FM, Chef's Association	Increase in agri-tourism products and visitors	Over 5 years	High	Considerable opportunities, but are new concepts in local tourism marketing

## **10. NEXT STEPS**

This Plan proposes a range of changes. Some are relatively easy, such as maintaining the current Agricultural Advisory Committee, and supporting the Fall Fair, while others such as watershed planning, and cooperative efforts between municipalities to address storm water management impacts on agricultural lands are very challenging. What is important at this early stage of implementing the plan is to establish some key first steps that can be accomplished so that momentum toward achieving other objectives is in place. Following are suggestions for key immediate actions:

### **1. Endorsement of the Agricultural Plan by the Regional District of Comox-Strathcona**

Proposals to address land use issues are the direct responsibility of the Regional District. Other proposals such as watershed planning are initiatives that are likely to happen only if the Regional District takes the initiative. Endorsement of the Agricultural Plan by the Regional District would mean that the Regional Board supports the proposed actions. RDCS Board and staff can then determine what proposed actions are feasible for them to address, availability of staff and other resources, and time frames for implementation. RDCS should circulate the Plan to the other organizations and agencies involved for their review, comment and endorsement.

### **2. Appointment of an "Agricultural Plan Implementation Committee"**

Because many different organizations are involved in the actions associated with the Plan, it will be important to establish a single group to provide ongoing support and advocacy for the plan. The Plan Steering Committee,

with additional representation from EDS/ADC and an organization representing environmental interests could be responsible for this task. The RDCS should appoint this group as an "Agricultural Plan Implementation Committee." This committee should have the mandate of providing leadership or "championing" the Plan, and taking the Agricultural Plan to proposed partners for their support and endorsement. They should monitor Plan implementation and report to RDCS and partners on progress in meeting the Plan's Goals and Objectives, and develop procedures to accomplish these tasks.

### **3. Establishment of an Agricultural Development Commission**

Most of the proposed actions require cooperation and coordination between various groups and organizations. There is currently no group or forum that brings these groups together. An Agricultural Development Commission comprised of individuals and representatives from local farm, retail, business, and other organizations could be the key to ensuring coordination, cooperation and implementation of those aspects of the Plan dealing with economic development and infrastructure.

### **4. Development of an Agricultural Plan implementation strategy by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries**

Support of The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries is essential to the success of this plan. Government agencies are limited in their ability to respond due to resource and staffing constraints. It will be important for MAFF to determine what proposed actions are feasible for them to address, and the time frame and resources necessary to address them.

## **APPENDIX A: STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

Dave Hansen	Agricultural Advisory Committee
Gerry McClintock	Farmers Institute
Len Lightfoot	Farmers' Market
Jack Turner	Electoral Area A
Barbara Price	Electoral Area B
Kel Kelly	Electoral Area C
Brenda Leigh	Electoral Area D
Rob Milne	RDCS staff
Beth Rees	RDCS staff
Niels Holbek	BC Agricultural Land Reserve Commission
Barry Smith	Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries
Jill Hatfield	Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries
Scott Crawford	Island Farmers Alliance

## **APPENDIX B: AGRICULTURAL PLAN ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES<sup>6</sup>**

### Agricultural Awareness

- Agricultural Awareness Committee
- RDCS Agricultural Advisory Committee
- Fall Fair
- Building linkages
- Agricultural Centre
- Agri-tourism

### Agro forestry

### Changing farm size

### Compost Production

### Cost of irrigation and drainage improvements

### Cost of “best management practices” for fish and wildlife

### Habitat conservation

### Drainage

- on farm
- basin
- agency/interest group awareness

### Farm business succession

### Farm Labour

- supply/demand
- training

### Farm uses outside the ALR

### Food self sufficiency

### Food safety

### Home based businesses

### Greenhouses and Mushroom farms

### Groundwater contamination

### Information access

### Infrastructure

- Barge facility
- Airport storage

### On-farm opportunities for income diversification

### Organic, Non-GMO market expansion

### Land application of biosolids and treated effluent

### Agricultural Land Reserve Commission/ALR policy changes

### Local market research

### Local marketing

### Meat inspection

### Nutrient management on farm

### Research, demonstration, extension

- Oyster River Farm

### Riparian habitat protection

### Sensitive Habitat Atlas use

### Supply management

### Trails and Greenways

### Urban/Rural conflict

- storm water
- trespass
- odour/noise/dust complaints
- litter
- traffic
- development areas

### Wetland protection

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<sup>6</sup> This inventory was developed from the public consultation process and review of other reports and Agricultural Plans. They were subsequently reviewed by the Steering Committee and included in the Plan based on priority and feasibility.

## **Appendix C: Environmental Farm Plans**

### **1. Introduction**

Development of an Environmental Farm Planning Program in British Columbia is currently being lead by the BC Agriculture Council and the Agriculture-Environment Partnership Initiative. This group is developing the “processes, infrastructure and delivery mechanism” for Environmental Farm Planning in BC. The BC Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries in conjunction with the task group is developing the 'toolkit' of materials. The Information on the proposed program is available from BCAC and MAFF.

Although program details are still being developed, the following provides a summary of the general scope of an Environmental Farm Plan.

### **2. Objectives of an Environmental farm Plan**

- i. Determine environmental risks and liabilities as well as strengths and assets that can impact a farmer's operation and natural resources
- ii. Flag areas of concern and identify priorities for improvement
- iii. Provide an education/awareness opportunity for farmers about environmental regulations that may apply to their farm

### **3. Environmental Farm Plan Priorities** (based on the Canadian Agrifood-Policy Framework)

- Nutrient Management
- Pest Management
- Land and Water Management
- Nuisance Management
- Biodiversity Management

### **4. Types of Environmental Farm Plan** (based on Canada wide discussions on what form EFP's will take across the country)

- Basic Environmental Farm Scan
- Environmental Farm Plan
- Environmental Farm Management System

The level of intensity and plan detail increases from the “Farm Scan” to the Farm Plan and then to the Farm Management System.

### **5. Scope of an Environmental Farm Plan:**

The document *"Developing an Environmental Farm Plan for Livestock Producers in BC"* includes a series of self assessment worksheets. The worksheets are developed as a series of questions concerning farm operations.

The intent of the proposed environmental farm plan program is to provide assessment methods for all types of farm operations. Following is an example of the question headings typically used for a livestock operation.



**Livestock Areas Review**

- Indoor Housing
- Confined Livestock Areas
- Seasonal Feeding Areas
- Grazing Areas

**Manure & Fertilizer Storage Review**

- Manure Storage
- Manure Storage Facilities
- Field Storage of Solid Manure - Short Term
- Field Storage of Solid Manure - Long Term
- Chemical Fertilizer Storage

**Manure & Fertilizer Use Review**

- Manure & Fertilizer Application
- Application Buffers
- Manure Composting
- Soil less Media Production
- Manure Treatment

**Livestock Feed & Water Review**

- Feed Storage, Handling & Use
- Livestock Watering
- Maintaining Yield & Uniformity
- Crop Management for Environmental Enhancement

**Water Supply Review**

- Water Wells
- Surface Intakes
- Fish Protection

**Water Management Review Worksheet**

- Irrigation Systems
- Drainage Systems
- Storm water

**Soil Review**

- Soil Sampling
- Soil Erosion
- Soil Quality

**Wood waste Review**

- Wood waste use

**Farmstead Site Review**

- Access Roads
- Water Crossings
- Building Construction
- Non-Agricultural Wastes

**Petroleum Products Review**

- Fuel Storage
- Disposal of Use Oil

**Farm Refuse & Sanitation Review**

- Safe Disposal of Farm Refuse
- Farm Septic System
- Farm Medical Waste
- Flies and Rodents
- Disposal of Moralities

## **6. Potential Benefits of Environmental Farm Plans**

- i. Demonstration of due diligence on the behalf of the farmer. Due diligence, a legal term, is demonstrated when proactive measures are taken to avoid the commission of an offense. This is the only recognized defense under environmental legislation.
- ii. Providing an effective management tool that could save money through more efficient nutrient management.
- iii. Possible eligibility for grants to assist in implementing solutions for identified areas of concern or opportunity.
- iv. Profitability from combining environmental responsibility with stewardship. A respect for environmental concerns is paramount as farm productivity depends on the health of the natural environment.
- v. Possible marketing advantage for farmers who make a commitment to use environmentally safe practices. As society grows more environmentally aware, responsible stewardship will become even more important.
- vi. Political and public recognition and acknowledgement of producer efforts to farm in an environmentally sustainable manner.
- vii. An industry led voluntary initiative aimed at improving environmental values will reduce requirement for regulatory action.