



Honourable Pat Bell  
Minister of Agriculture and Lands

# BC's AGRI-FOOD UPDATE



Featuring British Columbia's Agriculture Sector

NOVEMBER 2005

## FROM THE DESK OF PAT BELL

I'm fond of telling people that I have the best job in the world. To be able to make a difference in an area as vital as the sustainable production of safe, healthy food products is very satisfying, to say the least. Farmers markets rank near the top of the list of contributors to the "enjoyment factor" in my job. What can be more fun than wandering around your local farmers market on a Saturday morning?

One of the benefits of farmers markets that receives little attention is what they do to bridge what I call the urban-agricultural divide. By speaking directly with the people who grow and produce the food products, the consumer establishes connectivity with the source, and that's something we need more of in a world where many youngsters think what they're eating comes from the supermarket. Another benefit is that producers get direct, unfiltered feedback on the food they produce. That's an added value for any small-scale producer. In addition, farmers markets often provide a colourful adjunct to the shopping districts of many small B.C. communities.

The B.C. Association of Farmers' Market (BCAFM) is an umbrella organization that focuses on the interests of small-scale producers. It's a non-profit society that charges annual membership dues to each farmers market and in turn hires an executive director.

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*The Coquitlam Farmers Market is a busy place on Saturday morning. Photo courtesy of B.C. Association of Farmers' Markets*

## The Real Story on Farmers Markets

Recent articles in several community newspapers throughout B.C. are suggesting that "new" regulations will prohibit farmers from selling their products at farmers markets unless they've passed through a government inspected processing plant or slaughterhouse, as well as preventing the sale of canned, baked and home-cooked foods.

The "alarm" was raised in several communities through local newspapers and in many constituency offices, calls have been received by MLAs, with concerns about the "new rules" the government has "snuck in" that will make it "impossible" for farmers markets to continue.

There is absolutely no truth to the assertion that government wants to curtail or close farmers markets; in fact, the opposite is true. The Ministry of Agriculture and Lands has gone out of its way to encourage farmers markets throughout British Columbia.

Why is the public getting mixed messages? Perhaps it's due to the B.C. Ministry of Health introducing new meat inspection regulations in 2004 that triggered the concerns. Let's look at this a little closer.

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The current executive director is Bertie Wells who runs the association's affairs from an office in Kamloops. Bertie tells me that the roster of farm markets is expanding rapidly in B.C. Where there were 60 known farmers markets in the province in the year 2000, there are now 97. Farmers markets are flourishing.

I salute the B.C. AFM and the great job the organization does in encouraging the efforts of individual farmers markets in British Columbia. And I congratulate the growers, the owners of small holdings and the individuals who provide the products that consumers are so eager to buy on a weekly basis. If you haven't had a chance to check out your local farmers market, I would encourage you to do so. For the location and times that farmers markets are held in your community refer to the association's web site at [www.bcfarmersmarket.org/web/index.htm](http://www.bcfarmersmarket.org/web/index.htm)

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## B.C. AG FACT

A roast turkey dinner wouldn't be complete without the cranberry sauce and B.C. plays a huge role in ensuring there are enough of the bright red berries for North American holiday tables. B.C.'s cranberry bogs produce about 17 million kilograms yearly, valued at \$25 million. That's about 95 per cent of the cranberries grown in Canada, making B.C. the world's third largest producer of cranberries after Massachusetts and Wisconsin. The B.C. berries are grown by 50 family farm operations on 1,150 producing hectares located mainly in Richmond, Pitt Meadows and Fort Langley.

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In September of 2004, the Ministry of Health announced new meat inspection regulations. To ensure that public health is protected, all meat processors in British Columbia will be required to operate under one set of meat inspection regulations. To help industry comply with the new regulations, a two-year transition was established. By September 2006, all meat processors will be required to comply with the new regulations.

Through the B.C. Food Processors Association - Meat Industry Enhancement Strategy, we're working with industry to assist in the transition to the new regulations and to develop new and innovative ways of improving and expanding meat processing in B.C.

This will help ensure a safer supply of meat with all processors on an even playing field. In areas where there are no abattoirs, discussions are being held about the possibility of establishing mobile abattoirs that service specific regional areas.

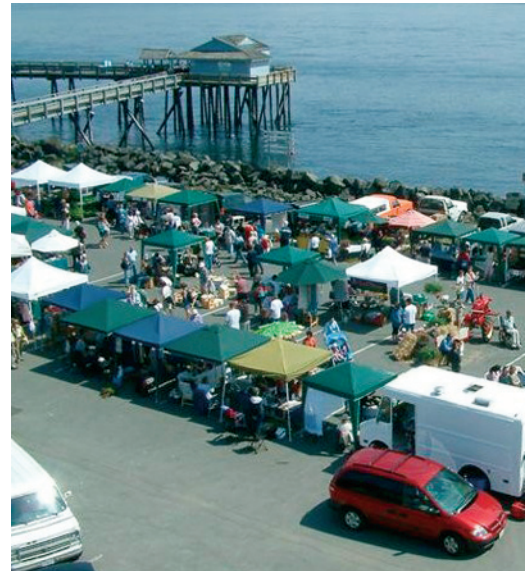
In the matter of selling food at farmers markets, the local Health Authority public health inspectors are responsible for public health issues.

The public health inspector has the discretion to remove any food that is sold at a temporary food market, if in their opinion, the food is a health hazard, as defined by Section 1 of the *Health Act*, or is contaminated as per Section 3 of the *Food Safety Act*.

There are a number of food items people may sell at farmers markets, including certain baked goods, jams and jellies. Vendors who want to prepare and sell food products at farmers markets should contact their local Health Authority for a copy of the *Guideline for the Sale of Food at Temporary Markets*.

The marketing of certain vegetables is regulated by the BC Vegetable Marketing Commission through its vegetable marketing scheme. The scheme applies to growers producing one ton or more of vegetable yearly. Those producing this amount or more should contact the commission if they require clarification of the rules or wish to seek an exemption. Contact the commission online at [www.bcveg.com/](http://www.bcveg.com/) or by phone at 604 542-9734.

These regulations, apart from the new rules for the meat industry, have not changed in a number of years. They are designed to protect the health and safety of all British Columbians and ensure product quality. They are certainly not designed to prevent the enjoyment of farmers markets by the consumers who find them so attractive.



The Pier Street Farmers Market in Campbell River has the added advantage of fresh ocean breezes. Photo courtesy of B.C. Association of Farmers' Markets