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## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Aug. 30, 2005

The Editor  
Chilliwack Progress

(346 words)

As minister responsible for agriculture I commend Black Press legislature reporter Tom Fletcher for his article. I welcome debate around the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) and around the agriculture industry as a whole.

The ALR is the largest it has ever been in its history, with more than 4.76 million hectares set aside for farming. There is more land now protected under the Agricultural Land Reserve than ever before. The previous government, which first introduced a panel-style review process for exclusion requests, allowed land to be excluded from the ALR at over twice the rate the current government did in its first three years (the most recent period for which data is available).

The Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) administers the ALR as an independent, arm's-length agency. In 2002, we enhanced the regional panel structure of the ALC to better balance provincial interests with community needs so that communities have greater input in local decisions. I favour maintaining an independent Agricultural Land Commission. I don't favour politicians getting involved in the decision-making process - it brings the entire process into jeopardy when you allow people in Victoria to make ALR decisions that directly impact Abbotsford, or Prince George, or Fort St. John.

I encourage your readers to view the ALC's website at [www.alc.gov.bc.ca](http://www.alc.gov.bc.ca). There you will find extensive statistics on the ALR, aerial photos of the Abbotsford decision as well as the Commission's rationale for the decision.

I favour keeping agricultural land within the reserve. That said where it makes sense and where there is a need, it is sometimes appropriate to consider the removal of some lands. We need to continue to balance the needs of individual communities with those of the agriculture industry as a whole.

An August 14 article in the Sunday Oregonian pointed to the fact that Oregon has lost 900,000 acres of productive farmland since 1980, while B.C. has gained acreage. Clearly, we have made the right decisions as B.C.'s Agricultural Land Reserve continues to be the envy of governments and farmers around the world.

Pat Bell  
Minister of Agriculture and Lands