

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The Editor
Alaska Highway News
Dec. 13, 2006

Re: "Farmers must unite, says NDP agriculture critic," Dec. 11, 2006

The agriculture industry is incredibly important to B.C.'s economy. It directly employs over 36,000 British Columbians and generates total farm cash receipts of \$2.4 billion. The Province will continue to work closely with farmers to ensure this industry thrives over the long-term.

In the Peace Region, we took quick action in the recent drought situation, and I visited Dawson Creek to speak directly to farmers affected by the dry conditions. We hosted three seminars to help cattle and dairy farmers cope with a shortage of home grown forage, all of which were well attended. The majority of grain and oilseed producers are insured through Production Insurance and we worked quickly to process claims and make payments as fast as possible. I also worked closely with federal Minister of Agriculture and Agri-food Canada Chuck Strahl for federal tax deferrals for livestock producers in northern British Columbia. Minister Strahl announced on Dec. 12 that the deferral had been approved by federal Minister of Finance Jim Flaherty.

We provided the BC Grain Producers Association with \$75,000 to help undertake a feasibility study for a biodiesel production facility in the Peace River area, which hopefully will help the grain and oilseed sector by providing an alternative lucrative market for their products and a value-added opportunity in the energy sector.

The Agriculture Planning Committee has been travelling the province holding public meetings to get feedback from farmers and other stakeholders. The committee was in the Dawson Creek area in June, and many people took the opportunity to provide direct input to us through this planning process. The Agriculture Plan for B.C. will address key issues, including profitability, investment and innovation, and other aspects important to the future of the agriculture sector in the province.

A thriving agriculture sector will support more jobs and contribute to a strong economy in B.C. A recent study has shown that B.C.'s farmers' markets contribute \$118.5 million annually to the provincial economy and I would encourage everyone to make the conscious decision to buy B.C. products. We can all help our farmers this Christmas season – and all year long – by buying B.C. grown and raised products.

Pat Bell
Minister of Agriculture and Lands
250 387-1023